



## **The Circassian Revival: A Quest for Recognition**

### **Mediated transnational mobilisation and memorialisation among a geographically dispersed people from the Caucasus**

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# The Circassian Revival: A Quest for Recognition

*Mediated transnational mobilisation and memorialisation  
among a geographically dispersed people from the Caucasus*



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## **Preface**

This thesis consists of a number of published papers and conference papers written between 2009 and 2013 that constitute the chapters 2 - 9. Chapter 2 was published in 2012 and the chapters 3 and 9 in 2013. Chapter 1 is the joint chapter where the key themes that connect the papers, which from the outset focus on different aspects of the Circassian revival, are outlined and discussed. This includes the key research questions. The conclusion is placed at the end of chapter 1.

As the published chapters are kept in their published form, a number of overlaps and repetitions cannot be avoided, though a few of the most obvious have been removed.

The thesis includes a comparatively high number of footnotes. This is partly due to the general lack of knowledge on Circassian context. It is also an acknowledgement of the importance of footnotes when researching into the Circassians as dispersed minorities that often have been forgotten or disappeared from many history books in, for instance, Russia and Turkey.

Background information on the Circassian context can be found in Appendix B: 'Facts and maps on Circassians and Circassia'.

# **Part I**

## *Chapter 1*

# **The Circassian Revival: A Quest for Recognition**

### **Mediated transnational mobilisation and memorialisation among a geographically dispersed people from the Caucasus**

The Winter Olympic Games will be held in Sochi by the Black Sea coast of Russia in 2014. The downhill skiing competitions of the Olympic Games will take place in the mountains at Krasnaya Polyana where, prior to 1864, the village Kbaada was located. On May 21, 1864 the Russian army used this place to celebrate its final victory over the Circassians, the last of the Caucasian Mountaineer peoples, following many decades of colonial warfare. The Russian victory of 1864 resulted in the expulsion of the Circassians from their historical homeland of Circassia - with hundreds of thousands fleeing to the Ottoman Empire under such harsh conditions that tens of thousands died during the flight. May 21 has become the annual day of commemoration among the Circassians.

The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics thus coincides with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Circassian exile. As a result, the planning of the Winter Olympics, an international mega event, has generated an acceleration of an already ongoing transnational revival of the Circassians. A number of new Circassian organisations have appeared and a number of claims have been made focusing on a variety of issues ranging from new options for repatriation to the homeland to calls for recognition of the forced exile as an act of genocide.

The Circassians today form a minority of 800,000 people in the North Caucasus region of Russia, while three to six million Circassians are scattered over many countries, especially in the states of the former Ottoman Empire, i.e. in Turkey and the Middle East. Several million Circassians reside in Turkey alone. Many Circassians have started to use the Internet to establish contacts across borders, and many new Circassian organisations have sprung up since the mid-2000s. As a part of this process, a new understanding of the 1864 forced exile as an act of genocide has grown



significantly among the Circassians. This issue was further elevated when, in May 2011, the Georgian parliament recognised the 1864 expulsion of the Circassians as genocide as the first UN recognised country.

Many Circassians in the diaspora have limited knowledge about their historical homeland, since all villages were burned down in the nineteenth century and more than seven generations have been living in exile. Today, an ever increasing number of Circassians speak of the city of Sochi as the place of the last Circassian parliament, which existed from 1861-1864. Sochi is therefore now often referred to as the “historical capital of our lost homeland”. Another Circassian narrative that has gained increased circulation refers to Krasnaya Polyana as a place where the blood of Circassians was spilled in 1864, due to the fact that the name Krasnaya Polyana can be translated as “Red Meadow”.

The role of the 2014 Sochi Olympics in the ongoing Circassian revival, which is increasingly becoming more transnational, is just one example of how an identity-building process can escalate due to an international mega event.

### **The aim and relevance of the thesis**

The overall purpose in writing this thesis is to unveil, present and discuss the rising transnational revival of the Circassians - composed of different but related indigenous minorities in Russia as well as diaspora groups in several countries. The different Circassian minorities consist of ethno-cultural-territorial groups in Russia while the many diaspora communities represent different categories of identification, illustrating the complexity of the Circassian context.<sup>1</sup> This is often a confusing challenge for the Circassians, which is illustrated by frequent questions aimed at clarifying definitions and identity at Circassian events or on websites.

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<sup>1</sup> Today, four Circassian peoples are found in the North Caucasus: Kabardians and the Shapsug represent old 'tribes', while the Adyg and the Cherkess are Soviet constructions (somewhat confusing as the former is the Circassians' own word for 'Circassian' and the latter is the term for 'Circassian' used in Russia, Turkey, Denmark, etc. The three constitute 'titular nations' in three republics: Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachai-Cherkessia. (Hansen and Krag, 1994). See Appendix B for further information.

It is the ambition of this thesis to discuss the overall development of the transnational Circassian mobilisation within the so-called Circassian World - frequently also referred to as the “fifty places around the world where Circassians reside”.<sup>2</sup> The contemporary Circassian revival is, in many ways, picking up from the immediate post-Soviet Circassian revival, which, by the mid-1990s, had experienced a set-back or was neutralised by the authorities. Since then, new conditions and initiatives have occurred that have contributed to today’s accelerated Circassian revival.

The key overall themes that I have chosen to illustrate and discuss the process of the Circassian revival are the three M’s that have guided significant parts of my research process: Mediated Mobilisation and Memorialisation.

Re. Mediation: the Circassian revival can be viewed as mediated, in particular, through civil society organisations and different forms of media. In the context of this thesis, however, I will concentrate on the latter and save the discussions on the role of civil society until the section on ‘mobilisation’. My focus on mediation is, on the one hand, inspired by the terms ‘print capitalism’ (Benedict Anderson 1983) and ‘electronic capitalism’ (Arjun Appadurai and others during the 1990s) as discussed in relation to processes of ethnic, indigenous or minority mobilisation - including a discussion of these terms in relation to the contemporary media technologies of late modern globalisation. In these discussions, I also draw upon discussions from media studies - including the role of remediation in relation to the multimodality of Web 2.0, which is particularly relevant to discussions on the role of memorialisation through the use of the Internet.

Re. Mobilisation: new types of Circassian civil society organisations and cyber-activists are engaged in efforts to broaden their space for action, engaging in lobbying efforts, gathering information and becoming ‘enlightenment activists’, etc. I draw upon studies of civil society development and social movements in order to discuss this issue, including Rogers Brubaker (1996 etc.), Saskia Sassen (2001 etc.) and others.

Re. Memorialisation: most of the key concerns of the Circassian mobilisation refer to issues of Circassian memory and some of the most significant activities are the protests against the 2014 Sochi Olympics; the struggle for recognition of genocide; and the annual events commemorating

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<sup>2</sup> ‘The Circassian World’ has been chosen as the name of one of the most important Circassian websites in the English language: [CircassianWorld.com](http://CircassianWorld.com).

the expulsion take place each year on May 21. The focus on memory is clearly visible in the radically increased Circassian Internet presence. Studies on memorialisation are manifold but, in my analysis, I have drawn inspiration from Pierre Nora (1997), Andreas Huyssen (2000) and others.

The three themes of mediated Circassian mobilisation and memorialisation as sketched above are intertwined and I study these as integrated parts of the ongoing *redefinition* of *Circassianness*. The discussion of this process of redefinition and re-negotiation will be seen in the context of recent geopolitical reconfigurations in the wider Caucasus region. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the areas of the north-western Caucasus, where the Russian Circassians live, have once more become a border-region with geopolitical implications. New power games in and around the Caucasus influence the Circassian context as illustrated, for example, by Russia's recognition of Abkhazia as an independent state in 2008 and by the formal recognition of the Circassian genocide by the Georgian parliament in 2011. These events have also proved important for some of the Circassian civil society organisations who strive to become transnational actors in these geopolitical games - as illustrated by the successful lobbying efforts of some Circassian diaspora organisations in relation to the parliaments of Georgia and other post-Soviet states. This can be seen as a form of geopolitical reconfiguration that can be assessed, for instance, using the term 'frontier zone (of globalisation)' developed by Saskia Sassen. The processes of redefining and re-identifying Circassianness according to categories of indigenoussness, ethnicity, minority-majority, and diaspora are discussed and understood in a contemporary - as well as from a historical - perspective. This will be assessed through discussions of the historical process of institutionalisation of Circassian ethno-cultural and territorial identity inspired by Rogers Brubaker (1996) and Anssi Paasi (1986, 1995).

The north-western Caucasus, where the Circassians are mainly found in pockets in the three above-mentioned republics, is today mainly known in Russia as the Kuban region or under the official name of Krasnodar Krai. In this region, the Kuban Cossacks have become a political force that also are presently undergoing a revival which, by many accounts, is countering the Circassian revival but is, to a larger degree, supported by both the regional and the federal authorities in Russia. This constitutes yet another trajectory of the contestedness that surrounds the Circassian revival.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to explore the above described themes in their geopolitical context, I have identified the following two main research questions:

- Which role do civil society actors - including civil society organisations and Internet-based activism - play in the ongoing Circassian mobilisation? What is the role of resistance or counter-memorialisation in the process of memorialisation? Which new trends can be identified? How can the recent trend of more directly targeting the Russian authorities be understood? What implications do the geopolitical reconfigurations have for the Circassian revival and to what extent can Circassian actors be regarded as geopolitical actors?
- In what way has mediation and remediation - especially through the Internet - come to play a key role in the Circassian revival? How do activists and civil society organisations try to reach the Circassians through the Internet and in what way has this affected the parallel processes of mobilisation and memorialisation? In what ways are the functionalities of Web 2.0 qualitatively and quantitatively different from the Electronic Capitalism of the 1990s and the Print Capitalism of earlier periods? How does the new Internet media respond to the Circassian needs for generation of information and knowledge?

## RELEVANCE OF THE ANALYSIS

Both in a Russian context and in the world at large, there is a lack of knowledge about Circassians - today well as historically. This is despite the explosion of information on the Internet and the significant exposure of Circassia and Circassians in the media of the nineteenth century. Provision of *knowledge* is a key part of the ongoing Circassian mobilisation. The need is great for scholars from outside the region to gain insight into an increasingly transnational context, where knowledge of minority identity and conditions of life is contested, and forms the background for possible future conflicts. Information and research thereof is only, to a limited degree, discussed in Russia - leaving space for various myths to circulate.

I find it relevant to assess how the Circassians, as a minority and as a dispersed number of diaspora groups around the world, can mobilise as civil society actors - especially by linking up to a mega sports event such as the 2014 Winter Olympics - to generate visibility and disseminate Circassian perceptions of history, establish their positions and promote their key issues such as the call for genocide recognition. This assessment can also provide an indication of the current status of the wider democratisation process in Russia, which seems to be further in focus as the Olympics approach. Similarly indications of civil society development in Turkey will also be included.

An analysis of the Circassian revival can illustrate - qualitatively as well as quantitatively - how the features of Web 2.0 and the new forms of social media are a radically different way of performing vernacular transnational mobilising. The thesis will provide input into the debate on the functioning of this new technology. This also represents a different angle on contemporary democratisation processes - in this case with significant sub-national as well as transnational implications. Thematically, this has parallels in the recent Arab Spring and the so-called 'colour revolutions' of the post-Soviet space as in Ukraine and Georgia in the former decade - which the present regime in Russia is actively attempting to counter.

The thesis will, hopefully, also contribute to the discussions on the role of transnational diaspora groups which, after more than a hundred years as largely invisible and silent groups, are able to mobilise in relation to their historical homeland and achieve a new positioning which is often rather critical or even hostile. An analysis of the historical process of institutionalisation of Circassia, Circassians and Circassianness can provide an insight into contemporary processes in the Caucasus and the wider post-Soviet space as a multi-ethnic area developing new forms of multicultural diversity under pressure from the authorities.

The recent geopolitical reconfigurations constitute another relevant discussion. Neighbouring Georgia is thus increasingly becoming involved in the North Caucasus after the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, which ended up with Russia recognising Abkhazia, which borders the historical Circassian homeland. The Abkhaz are regarded by the Circassians as a sister people and both belong to the category of north-western Caucasian peoples and languages. These geopolitical reconfigurations in a border area are affecting the Circassian mobilisation and have actively involved some of the Circassian civil society actors.

## **The Themes of the Thesis**

In the Circassian context the themes of mediated memorialisation and mobilisation are closely connected and will therefore in the following be discussed both separately and together. The role of media and mediation is an obvious issue to discuss in relation to the ongoing Circassian revival, which is apparent in relation to issues of memorialisation and mobilisation, where the use of the Internet in particular has become a key part of both processes. Mediated representations of Circassian history and identity play a key role in the Circassian revival and will, as such, be included in the discussions.

The arrival of new types of civil society organisations among the Circassians marks a new form of mobilisation with a stronger focus on modern civil rights, and it is based on political action and new types of lobbying efforts. Memorialisation, which includes research, documentation and information dissemination as key elements, is mainly carried out by civil society actors with two main target groups: other Circassians are targeted in order to increase their historical awareness of Circassian identity and history (while simultaneously enhancing potential mobilisation). Another primary target group are the Russian authorities - especially with the purpose of challenging official Russian history-writing, for instance, by providing documentation from historical archives. This represents a new level of knowledge production and knowledge generation, whereby Circassians themselves take part in the formulation and reformulation of Circassian culture and identity to a much larger extent than before. Geopolitical reconfigurations in the Caucasus region have resulted in new possibilities for alliance-building for transnational Circassian civil society actors but have also opened up the possibility of potential new reactions from the Russian authorities that threaten these newfound possibilities. As in the nineteenth century the power-knowledge axis again plays a key role in understanding the Circassian revival although this time the role of new media technologies and civil society mobilisation is significantly different - as is also the case with the transnational aspects.

Finally, I wish to discuss the process of the institutionalisation of ‘Circassianness’ over the last two hundred years as a way of understanding and framing some key elements of the Circassian revival. ‘Resistance’ and ‘protest’ will be relevant to discuss in relation to all the above-mentioned themes - as this is part of an understanding of contemporary contexts of indigenous, minority and/or diaspora existence.

## **Mediation, Internet and Digital Diaspora**

Mediation refers to the increasing role of the media in almost all spheres of society and, in relation to the Circassian context, the increasingly significant role of the Internet in the Circassian revival in particular - within memorialisation as well as mobilisation processes.<sup>3</sup> A starting point for my understanding of this dimension is the role of mediation outlined by Benedict Anderson in his book ‘Imagined Communities’ from 1983, which describes how ‘print capitalism’ became instrumental in the construction of nationalism in the production of modern nation-states from the nineteenth century on.<sup>4</sup> In the aftermath of the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Anderson’s ideas gained prominence in many scholarly analyses. I still find this approach relevant in relation to discussing contemporary processes among ethnic minorities - and diaspora groups - as in the case of the Circassian revival. These processes of ‘imagining communities’ also take place on levels other than the new nation-states - as has been illustrated on several occasions in the post-Communist world – for instance by ethnic minority groups that had or still have some form of secondary-level territorial-administrative autonomy, which often represents a continuation from the Soviet period (Brubaker 1996; Hansen 2003). In several areas, this led to increased tension with the - new and often nationalising - nation-state and sometimes evolved into violent conflicts as seen, for instance, in relation to Kosovo/Serbia, Abkhazia/Georgia and Chechnya/Russia - though they all followed different paths. The process of print capitalism and nation-building - on a secondary level - also affected many other nationalities in the Caucasus including the Circassians in the three republics of the region, where they constitute titular-nationalities as the Kabardians, Cherkess and

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<sup>3</sup> In a different understanding, ‘civil society organisations’ could be included as having a mediating role in the Circassian revival, but I have chosen to deal with civil society organisations under the theme of ‘mobilisation’. ‘Tourism’ can also be seen having as a mediating role in relation to Circassian memorialisation and mobilisation.

<sup>4</sup> The rapid expansion of the ‘media sector’ - especially through the Internet - has led to a number of academic discussions within media and communication studies on how this phenomenon should be analysed. This includes a discussion of which terminology should be preferred, for instance, whether to use the term ‘mediation’ or ‘mediatisation’ (Livingstone 2009; Hjarvad 2013).

Adygs respectively. The fact that Anderson ascribes the introduction of the phenomenon of print-capitalism - in a modern understanding - to the early phases of nationalism and national movements in the nineteenth century also renders it relevant to discuss in relation to Circassia and the Circassians of the nineteenth century.

In 1996, Arjun Appadurai (drawing on inspiration from others) employed the term 'electronic capitalism' to encompass the changes in media technology - especially the role of television, radio and the initial version of the Internet (Appadurai 1996).<sup>5</sup> Among the features of electronic capitalism highlighted by Appadurai, the 'aural' and 'visual' elements encompass a strong potential for the emotional engagement of target groups and, potentially, have a greater outreach towards audiences - though still largely non-digital. Furthermore, specific language skills - as in the case of the written media - are not required. Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, there was a significant rise in the number of publications on Circassian history and identity in the North Caucasus - including translations of books from the nineteenth century never before published in the Soviet Union or in the preceding Russian Empire, where censorship usually prohibited this.<sup>6</sup> Some of these publications included eyewitness reports that challenged the official history books that many Circassian actors wished to revise. Many of these publications are now remediated and digitalised for presentation on the Internet - often with a choice between purchasing a copy or finding free copies on the Internet.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, electronic media began to gain importance in several of the North Caucasian republics, with a limited number of weekly hours of programmes in the Circassian language on issues of Circassian history and traditions. These became very popular among the audiences as I observed during my field work in the 1990s. The 1990s were, for the Circassians in Russia, marked by an overlap of print and electronic capitalism due to the delay of almost 150 years of censorship and other restrictions on free publishing on issues relating to the Circassian minorities.

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<sup>5</sup> In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan had already published now famous books where he discussed "mankind leaving a typographic age and entering an electronic one" and, in the book 'Understanding Media', he coined the term the 'global village' to describe the new age of electronic media (Turner 2006, 53). The terms 'information economy' (Castells) or 'knowledge economy' (Bowker) have also regularly been used in relation to this phenomenon.

<sup>6</sup> This included a number of non-scientific publications describing and celebrating Circassian history and culture. Some of these could express harsh opposition to official Russian history-writing and/or managed to offend neighbouring peoples - whether ethnic Russians or those belonging to other Caucasian groups.

<sup>7</sup> Books published by Circassians and other Caucasians in the diaspora countries were also now translated and published in the North Caucasus.



As an extension of the above-mentioned terms used by Anderson and Appadurai, I have chosen to argue for the use of the term ‘digital capitalism’ to designate the contemporary period dominated by the features of the so-called Web 2.0. This is an updated version of the two preceding periods of print and electronic capitalism, representing a third phase of media technological development. Jürgen Habermas has stressed how the printing press only “unfolds its cultural and political significance” with the arrival of modernism. “It brings with it an enlargement of the communicative action which, through electronic mass communication, as developed during the twentieth century, has been intensified once more” (Habermas 1996, 366 - my translation).<sup>8</sup> As an extension of the theory of Benedict Anderson, I argue that the present period of digital capitalism could be labelled as yet another intensification. This (gradual) shift from electronic towards digital capitalism more than indicates the role of speed and acceleration in this process. I argue that we are witnessing a profound change or shift in the form and practice of mediation with the arrival of Web 2.0, which potentially has significant consequences for processes of memorialisation and mobilisation - as the case of the Circassian revival illustrates.

Cyberspace today functions as a space for identity negotiation and, as illustrated in the case of the Circassian revival and the role of historical documentation and accounts, digitalised archives etc., which illustrates how the Internet can function as “an essential repository for information” (Brinkerhoff 2009, 57). As argued by Jeff D. Himpele the increased ‘mediation’ has resulted in an “upsurge of new cultural identities and practises” among many minority groups and indigenous peoples (Himpele 2008, 11). Internet mediation has become what Himpele refer to as “techniques of empowerment” to many such groups and people. As Fred Turner has noted: “the now widespread association of computers and computer-mediated communication with the egalitarian social ideals of the counterculture, have become important features of an increasingly networked mode of living, working, and deploying social and cultural power” (Turner 2006, 9).<sup>9</sup> And as Turner further notes on what he refer to as the ‘electronic frontier’: “Digital technologies had inherited the transformational mantle of the counterculture” (Turner 2006, 164).

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<sup>8</sup> The contemporary phase of digital capitalism is also characterised by a more transnational, global or cosmopolitan outlook compared to the electronic capitalism of the 1990s, which was more state-centric (Saunders 2009).

<sup>9</sup> To develop a tool with a potential for democratic or popular empowerment was part of the motivation of some of the key developers the initial versions of the Internet back in the 1960s.

Access to the Internet is increasingly seen as a fundamental human right by users worldwide as illustrated by a BBC investigation from 2010. As Hamadour Touré has put “the right to communicate cannot be ignored” and “the Internet is potentially the most powerful source of enlightenment ever created”.<sup>10</sup> Still, limitations and restrictions of the space for action of an indigenous people such as the Circassians are considerable in authoritarian states though generally the space for online digital mediation is wider than offline.

As one way of addressing a digital diaspora context, the anthropologist Maximillian Forte has developed a model for the analysis of Internet-generated revival among indigenous people which I find relevant and useful to discuss in order to understand the Circassian diaspora context. This model is called the ‘V.E.R.A.city loop’ and comprises the four issues of Visualisation, Embodiment, Recognition and Authenticity, which are linked in a continuously ongoing loop-process (Forte 2006, 145). This will be discussed further below under the section ‘mobilisation’, though the role ‘visualisation’ should be noted as a specifically important characteristic of the present phase of digital mediation. Documentation that earlier had to be found in archives or in book published in different countries in different languages, have now been digitalised and immediately accessed on the Internet. And as Kyra Landzelius notes indigenous cyberactivism: “cyberspace often presents a staging ground for the defence of authenticity” (Landzelius 2006, 23).

The term ‘digital diaspora’ is used to describe de-territorialised groups use the Internet that can be used to perform and produce virtual re-territorialisation. Sreberny has characterized the Internet as the “diasporic medium par excellence” (Sreberny 2001, 156). I have applied the term ‘iCircassia’ - Internet-Circassia - to the new phenomenon of transnational information sharing, establishment of digital archives (and documentation), and the new links and new forms of cooperation developed among Circassians across the world. I argue that iCircassia represents an additional level that supplements the already existing Circassian World that traditionally have been defined as consisting of Circassians in the homeland plus in the Circassians in the diaspora. This is a new transnational Circassian public space that includes new interlinked networks and new flows of information. Internet visibility and the visual identity of the Circassian revival clearly involves a number of specific key visual elements that are repeated again and again and have become icons of the Circassian Revival (CR2): the flag, the cherkeska, the dancers (in Circassian dresses), certain

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<sup>10</sup> Touré is General Secretary of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). [Finerminds.com/personal-growth/source-of-enlightenment](http://Finerminds.com/personal-growth/source-of-enlightenment).

prehistoric elements (dolmen's, archeological findings), the nature – the mountains (especially Elbrus), waterfalls etc. In this respect, the production and reproduction of visual identity of a cyber-nation show the same type of essentialist approach found in most nation-states.

One example of the Circassian use of Web 2.0 is the use of 'viral communications' in campaigns by organisations such as the Circassian Cultural Institute (CCI) from New Jersey, USA, the Caucasus Forum from Turkey etc. The production and circulation of videos through websites such as Facebook and YouTube has become a cheap and efficient tool that youth activists and cyber-activists in particular use - also known as 'viral videos'. For instance, in relation to the annual May 21 commemorative events, viral videos are used to inform and mobilise target groups to participate in demonstrations and other events - while simultaneously providing information to the public at large. Historical images from the nineteenth century are often digitalised and/or remediated for use in these videos although the forms vary greatly as organisations are becoming increasingly aware of not using the same formula from year to year. These viral videos hereby constitute an example or a meeting point of all 3Ms: mediated memorialisation and mobilisation. The role of a so-called Facebook-revolution among Circassian youth activists will be discussed below in relation to 'mobilisation' and the so-called YouTubian-memorialisation in relation 'memorialisation'.

The second generation Internet or Web 2.0 is often referred to as a transnational hypermedia space where mobility, interactivity and visibility are combined in new ways. This in relation to the Circassian revival includes a significant remediation of earlier media output that can easily be circulation through the tools of the second generation Internet. The role of digital diaspora and civil society empowerment will be discussed in the section below on 'mobilisation'. Mediation relating to memorialisation and mobilisation, respectively, will be further discussed below.

## **Memorialisation**

The frequent use of terms such as the 'memory turn', the 'memory boom', the 'memory syndrome', the 'age of commemoration' or the 'memory drive' indicate why the study of memory and memorialisation has become increasingly widespread (Andreas Huyssen 2003, 16). The many

media representations of, in particular, issues such as the Holocaust and the Second World War, illustrate one element of the memory boom in recent decades, which Nora has also labelled an acceleration of memory (Nora 1996, 1).<sup>11</sup> Different forms of memorialisation have been at the centre of most of the post-Soviet national and sub-national identity-building processes, as many cultural and ethnic groups felt either dominated or repressed during the Soviet period.<sup>12</sup> The massive legacy of manipulated and potentially conflicting memories from the era of the Soviet Union had already been addressed during the period of Perestroika in the late 1980s - illustrated by, for instance, the well-known Russian organisation Memorial,<sup>13</sup> a civil society organisation that has continuously lobbied for a proper reassessment of the Soviet past. A search of archives and the dissemination of information on the history of repression, including individual victims as well as formal acts of public commemoration and erection of monuments were from the outset part of the work of Memorial. Considering the often enormous extent of post-war and post-genocide memorialisation processes and the defining agendas these play in many societies and nations, this is hardly surprising.

Andreas Huyssen has defined three types of 'memory narratives' that have gained significance in the period of late-modernism since the 1970s - and which, as such, supplement the specific role of the Holocaust (i.e. a fourth type): musealisation; the traumatic side of memory: memorials, apologies etc.; and the combination of memory, entertainment and trauma in cultural products such as books and films (Huyssen 2000, 24). These are all issues that are useful to the discussion of contemporary Circassian memorialisation processes, which are increasingly centred on a redefinition of the forced Circassian exile in the nineteenth century as an act of genocide. Huyssen notes that the Holocaust can function as "a prism through which we may look at other instances of genocide" (Huyssen 2003, 14).<sup>14</sup> Huyssen further states that "memory discourses of a new kind first

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<sup>11</sup> This also includes a rise in academic research and publication on various aspects of memory and memorialisation which, according to Huyssen, can also be seen as a bulwark against oblivion and forgetting (Huyssen 2003, 23). According to Huyssen, this is also a way of counteracting the fear of forgetting, which can potentially become a real threat considering the sheer amount of material published (Huyssen 2000, 29).

<sup>12</sup> This occasionally led to conflicts, some of which evolved into wars that were covered by the international media. A 'conflict-understanding' is therefore often found in public representations of the Caucasus in the international media.

<sup>13</sup> Memorial is one of the oldest rights-based post-Soviet organisations in Russia and is generally widely respected. Still, the authorities regularly put pressure on Memorial, for instance when the computers of Memorial's branch in Saint Petersburg were confiscated in November 2008. This resulted in a reaction from office director Irina Flinge, who stated that Memorial was targeted for being on "the wrong side of a new ideological divide" - 'Putinism' as based on a "strident form of nationalism". Which includes not least the idea "that Stalin and the Soviet regime were successful in creating a great country" ("Stalin's new status in Russia", 27-12-2008, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7798497.stm).

<sup>14</sup> In the case of the Circassians, the Armenian genocide recognition process plays an equally important role, as mainly civil society and exile-driven over many decades and also as located in the Caucasus with strong links to the 'imperial

emerged in the West after the 1960s in the wake of decolonisation and the new social movements and their search for alternative and revisionist histories” (Huyssen 2003, 12).<sup>15</sup> Taras Kuzio has discussed these memory discourses in relation to the post-Soviet context and concluded: “Thus, it is incumbent upon scholars to place post-Soviet ‘imperial transitions’ within the worldwide process of decolonisation that has taken place since the conclusion of World War II (Kuzio 2001, 260)”.<sup>16</sup> In relation to the Circassian context, it is necessary to take the debate on the imperial transition into nation-states as also including the secondary level of federal republics in Russia, as the process of imperial break-up or ‘unmixing of peoples’ was different in the case of Russia/Soviet Union to the European imperial break-up processes.

The French historian Pierre Nora has stated that the memories of minorities is the key to the memory turn that marked a protest against the many nation-state projects around the world, which often ignored minority identities and eventually cracked under what Nora refers to as a double movement: “The internal collapse of the myth that bore the national project and the emancipation that liberated the minorities” (Nora 2002, 7). In a Circassian-Russian context - and partly also in a Turkish context - this outlines a battlefield (undergoing reconfiguration) rather than the internal collapse of national myths and the emancipation of liberated minorities that Nora appears to describe in a French context.<sup>17</sup> Still, Nora’s conclusion illustrates why the actors of the Circassian movement are mobilising and why they experience this as a legitimate part of an international trend. He also stresses the close link between memorialisation and mobilisation.

“Among the new nations, independence has swept into history societies newly awakened from their ethnological slumbers by colonial violation. Similarly, a process of interior decolonisation has affected ethnic minorities, families, and groups that until now have possessed reserves of memory but little or no historical capital” (Nora 1989, 7).<sup>18</sup> In the case of the Circassian revival, it is this kind of ‘reserves of memory’ or ‘historical capital’ that has been brought into play, but I will discuss how ‘interior decolonisation’ can be understood in a Circassian, Caucasian and Russian

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reconfigurations’ between the Russian Empire/the Soviet Union on the one side and Ottoman Empire/Turkey on the other, as well as with Circassian groups and individuals involved in the atrocities in 1915.

<sup>15</sup> A. Dirk Moses and others have discussed how ‘genocide’ increasingly has become part of analyses of the history of empire and colonialism.

<sup>16</sup> Like much of the literature on the post-Soviet contexts, Kuzio also mainly performs his analysis on the level of the nation-state.

<sup>17</sup> Also reflected in the terms ‘competing memories’ and ‘counter-memorialisation’.

<sup>18</sup> More on social capital and cultural capital under ‘mobilisation’ below.

context.<sup>19</sup> In extension of the discussion of mediation above, the Internet can in a number of different ways function as a site of memory.

‘Sites of Memory’ - a term first developed by Pierre Nora - is one of the key terms used to address the processes of memorialisation in this thesis. Nora: “There are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer milieu de memoire, real environments of memory.” (Pierre Nora 1989, 7). Such sites of memory can be material as well as immaterial places of symbolic relevance to a particular site of memory. According to Nora ‘sites of memory’ are linked to “a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn...” (Nora 1989, 7). Nora also refer to the turning point of modernity as related to the emergence of discourses on ‘sites of memory’, and Nora further notes that “such a fundamental collapse of memory is but one familiar example of a movement towards democratisation and mass culture on a global scale” (Nora 1989, 7).

The term ‘sites of memory’ is used to discuss the ongoing redefinition of the role of Sochi as a key location of Circassian history - as a site of long-distance (counter-)memorialisation. In this discussion, I will attempt to combine ‘sites of memory’ with discussions on ‘long-distance belonging’ - as examined by several authors in relation to diaspora groups - and/or ‘long-distance nationalism’ as elaborated by Benedict Anderson and others.<sup>20</sup> In this case, a special focus is placed on the Circassian diaspora’s use of the Internet in their mobilisation efforts built around the protests against the 2014 Winter Olympics - a process that is linked to promoting the agenda on genocide recognition, in which Sochi and the greater Sochi area gain a key role, for instance in the documentation material found, researched, remediated and circulated. Sochi is thus elevated to a new and significantly greater role in the Circassian memorialisation process - as a representation and as a symbol of the lost homeland that simultaneously constitutes a concrete physical space in the Caucasus.

As an extension of the term ‘site of memory’, Hue-Tam Ho Tai discusses the term ‘memorial nation’: “It would seem that nations are most likely to be in need of *lieux de memoire* when they are in their most liminal states: when they are being born and are in need of instant antiquity or when they are besieged, either by internal or external forces. Nora observes what he calls an ‘acceleration

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<sup>19</sup> More on the institutionalisation of ethnic categories (and identity) during the Soviet period below.

<sup>20</sup> Besides Anderson, see also Glick-Schiller and Fouron (2001) etc.

of memory' as a result of ever-multiplying technologies of remembering; these technologies also have the effect of undermining nation-states" (Tai 2001, 918).<sup>21</sup> Considering at least parts of the ongoing processes of memorialisation, both Russia/Russians and the Circassians can be seen as being in a liminal state - or in a state of prolonged post-Soviet transition and identity-building processes on different levels - whereby understandings of being under various forms of threat play a key role.

As already mentioned, another key term in relation to memorialisation and the role of civil society organisations in the contemporary Circassian revival is 'decolonisation'. The role of empire, colonisation and decolonisation is not just part of the statements and claims made by many of the Circassian actors but part of a general discussion on the legacy of the Soviet Union (and the Russian Empire as her predecessor).<sup>22</sup> This has been an ongoing debate for the last twenty years although it has often been argued that a colonial framing is irrelevant given the special character of the Russian Empire as an entity that expanded over land as opposed to the overseas colonies of the Western European empires. This is an explanation especially popular within Russia, albeit for different reasons, and with an increasing understanding of the need for discussion on various problematic elements.<sup>23</sup> As noted by Kuzio (2002, 260) "...the reclaiming of the past, the revival of national history and collective memory is central to 'imperial transitions' in overcoming their colonial legacies. The reclaiming of national history for post-colonial Soviet states - with the exception of Belarus - is taking place at the same time as their rejection of Tsarist and Soviet imperial historical frameworks that denied them a past, present or future."<sup>24</sup> This type of reclaiming of a national history also takes place on a sub-national level in the North Caucasian republics as well as within civil society mobilisation as seen in the case of the Circassians. According to Kuzio "...it is incumbent upon scholars to place post-Soviet imperial transitions within the worldwide process of decolonisation that has taken place since the conclusion of World War II" (2002, 260).

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<sup>21</sup> Tai mentions, for instance, the Internet and electronic media, border transcendence and long-distance nationalism.

<sup>22</sup> According to 'The Black Book of Colonialism', the Russian Federation of today is a surprisingly imperial successor state that does not accept or recognise its former status (Ferro 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Russia and the Soviet Union have, over the years, often been left out of various analyses of empires and colonialism - for different reasons, or due to different definitions and categorisations - sometimes geography, sometimes the type of expansion, sometimes communism/socialism etc. including, for instance, Edward Said (Irwin 2006, 305). This has resulted in accusations of being revisionists, apologists etc. Robert Conquest notes that the Russian conquest of the Caucasus took place in the nineteenth century and was "thus comparable to other colonial empires" (Conquest 2000, 243).

<sup>24</sup> This is yet another example of a desire to analyse the 'nation-state-level' focussing on RSFSR and the new states, while overlooking different forms of sub-nationalism, sub-regionalism, local indigenous processes on different levels etc.

A recent categorisation of five models for formal confrontations with the past - especially but not only in legal terms - establishes a hierarchy ranging from the total confrontation with the past (as in the Nuremberg Trials following the Second World War) to an international confrontation (as in the war-crime tribunals after the wars in ex-Yugoslavia), to an internal confrontation (as in post-Apartheid South Africa), delayed confrontations (as in Cambodia) and, finally, rejection as the fifth and final form of confrontation with crimes of the past (with Russia as the major example).<sup>25</sup> This is not fully justifiable in relation to Russia as some form of historical rehabilitation has taken place - organised for instance by the above-mentioned Memorial in relation to, for example, Siberian forced labour camps and crimes of the Stalin era - but it is still an indication of the existing problems and the overall situation. The problem is that these processes have often been partial, incomplete, unimplemented - or, as in the case of the Circassians from the North Caucasus, largely rejected or manipulated (Genocide, 450th anniversary).

Post-Soviet debates and conflicts over memory and history writing are found not only in Russia but all over the former USSR. Such debates have also been at the heart of the post-Soviet - and increasingly transnational - Circassian re-identification processes as they began during Perestroika in the late 1980s. This is no surprise. The same happened all over the former Soviet Union and in post-Communist Eastern Europe. In the case of the Circassians, this includes a widespread understanding of being denied the right to write and present their history from a Circassian perspective. This is a position shared by a number of indigenous peoples and minorities around the world - whether they are living under colonial, post-colonial or 'partly decolonised, partly recolonised' conditions.<sup>26</sup> The latter could be used to describe the situation for many of the post-Soviet peoples in the North Caucasus that still refer to the violent wars in the nineteenth century as their tragedy.<sup>27</sup>

This type of conflict is often referred to as 'memory wars' (or 'web wars'<sup>28</sup>) in analyses of the developments in the post-Soviet space.<sup>29</sup> For instance, in relation to, on the one hand, the schism

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<sup>25</sup> From the Danish newspaper Politiken (27-07-2012).

<sup>26</sup> These are circumstances also discussed by Derek Gregory, Edward Said, Linda T. Smith etc.

<sup>27</sup> This is, for instance, widely the case in eastern North Caucasian areas of Dagestan and Chechnya.

<sup>28</sup> And 'cyberwars': for instance on the cyber-attacks on Estonia and Georgia (among others Evgeny Morozov, slate.com, 14-08-2008).



between the historical ‘falsification debate’ in Russia (which is largely driven by attempts to protest at the slandering of Stalinist victories by various post-Soviet actors - whether within Russia or in some of the other post-Soviet states)<sup>30</sup>, and, on the other, the processes among Russia’s neighbouring states of defining new ‘national tragedies’, as in case of the Ukrainian Holodomor (the enforced famine of the 1930s) and the Georgian redefinition of the years under Russian/Soviet rule as 400 years of Russian repression.<sup>31</sup>

Disagreements over history writing and counter-memorialisation processes are widespread in the post-Soviet space and, as such, the official Russian history writing contested by Circassian actors in their acts of counter-memorialisation is no surprise. Two examples, both from 2007, illustrate the renewed Circassian memorialisation: firstly, that Circassian history in the region was fully ignored in the extensive material prepared and published in relation to Russia winning the right to host the Winter Olympics in Sochi in 2014. Secondly, the fact that during 2007 the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ‘voluntary union’ between Russia and the Circassians was celebrated with an extensive and expensive programme, in spite of the fact that the same kind of celebration was cancelled ten years earlier with the argument that it ran contrary to historical fact.<sup>32</sup> Both examples became the object of protests and renewed mobilisation within the Circassian diaspora.

Many Circassian websites present counter-narratives or a kind of resistance towards the official Russian version of Circassian history. As such, these initiatives can be labelled both post-colonial and post-totalitarian actions of resistance and protest.

The so-called ‘war of conferences’ on the Circassian Question peaked in 2010 with the conference in Tbilisi, Georgia entitled ‘Hidden History, Enduring Crimes’, which focused on the forced

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<sup>29</sup> The research projects ‘Memory at War’ ([memoryatwar.org](http://memoryatwar.org)) and ‘Web Wars’ ([web-wars.org](http://web-wars.org)) both include a significant focus on post-Soviet memorialisation contexts.

<sup>30</sup> As noted by the Russian historian, Nikolay Koposov, the use of the term ‘falsification’ “is very telling indeed: Falsifiers of History was the title of a pamphlet published under Stalin’s supervision in 1948 to defend the USSR from similar accusations of initiating the war.” (Koposov 2011).

<sup>31</sup> “In May 2009, President Dmitri Medvedev created a commission to review “falsifications of history to the detriment of Russia’s interests,” delegating the commission to govern historical debate and to prevent the expression or publication of historical judgments “unfavourable” to Russia” (Koposov 2011). This commission was particularly a reaction to the Ukrainian rewriting of the history of Stalin’s period and the rewriting of the same period in history books in the Baltic States. Pierre Nora, as chairman of *Liberte Pour l’Histoire*, that successfully protested and campaigned against suggested memory laws in France, joined the international protests against the suggested Russian memory laws in 2009-2010 ([lph-asso.fr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=78&Itemid=174&lang=en](http://lph-asso.fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=78&Itemid=174&lang=en)).

<sup>32</sup> A commission of historians of mixed ethnic backgrounds reached this verdict in the 1990s.

eviction of the Circassians from the Caucasus in the nineteenth century. As an outcome of this conference (which has its own article on Wikipedia), a formal appeal was forwarded to the Georgian parliament suggesting that the Circassian genocide should be recognised.<sup>33</sup> The conference is therefore often referred to as the beginning of the process that, a year later, resulted in Georgian recognition of the Circassian genocide. Similar issues had previously been addressed at other conferences but, this time, Russia chose to react with ‘counter-conferences’.<sup>34</sup> Two conferences were held in Moscow which included a number of Circassian organisations and individuals that were generally regarded as friendly towards Russia, or at least neutral. On one occasion this initiative backfired when a representative of the Circassian Association in California chose to criticise the lack of discussion and potential recognition of the Circassian genocide. A conference planned to take place in Jordan - that some regarded as a follow-up to the Tbilisi conference - was cancelled later in 2010 after Russian pressure was placed on the government in Jordan.

Internet-mediated memorialisation has become a key aspect of the Circassian revival, with new ways of transferring and distributing digitalised knowledge. The hypermedia space of Web 2.0 - which characterises ‘digital capitalism’, as mentioned above - has generally resulted in a “flattening out of knowledge hierarchies”, which “can be a very powerful social force” (Bowker 2008, 256). Still, access to historical knowledge in imperial archives is still - partly - restricted for Circassian actors in Russia. In relation to the search for documentation material from the period of war and colonisation that led to the expulsion of most Circassians from the Caucasus in the nineteenth century, new openings appeared in Georgia, where a part of the imperial archives on Caucasian issues are located. Many of these sources have since been researched, digitalised and transnationally shared through the Internet. Similar processes are taking place vis-à-vis imperial Ottoman archives, where archives, for instance, have been searched in transnational cooperation and the ensuing publication of results has included Russian language versions published in Russia.

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<sup>33</sup> Wikipedia is an example of a new Internet media that has offered an increasing space for knowledge and information on a minority group such as the Circassians. Wikipedia has increasingly been recognised as a source of information and knowledge, with ‘margins of error’ now almost on par with Britannica. (‘Click-on-Knowledge Conference’, Copenhagen University, May 2011).

<sup>34</sup> A shift away from the earlier strategy of mainly ignoring Circassian claims and standpoints, which appears to be motivated by the imminent threat of genocide recognition by the first UN-recognised state.

Cyberspace can be understood as a 'total archive', as noted by Huyssen and others, or as an 'essential repository', as noted by Brinkerhoff. Perhaps the constantly increasing amount of digitalised historical and cultural information on the Circassians that can now be found on the Internet constitutes an 'alternative national archive' of a non-state-supported and dispersed people? According to Lev Manovich, the 'database' is the model for a new form of media that can remediate and encompass all preceding media forms in a multitude of new combinations. Jack Andersen has referred to this as a 'new cultural form' that radically changes former ways, which often consisted of narratives presented for audiences - now these audiences can themselves produce fully different narratives or combine the information available in a multitude of different ways (Andersen 2008). This is potentially also a way of bypassing possible 'gatekeepers' or 'filters' that exist elsewhere or in other media forms. The database character of the Internet is also an illustration of how these features have improved the options for activities focusing on the provision of documentation and knowledge, as is the case with a significant part of the Circassian movement.

An example of Internet-mediated Circassian memory is found in the so-called YouTubian memorialisation according to which Circassian actors - using low-cost methods - present Circassian history and culture in a number of different ways. Some are quickly made with a simple presentation of images taken from the Internet and then remixed into a Circassian narrative while others may be history lessons of a professional quality. These viral videos often generate comments and debate, illustrating the potentially mobilising role of Internet-mediated memorialisation.

In general the performance of memory, such as for instance the use of visual representations from the nineteenth century on the Internet, marks a field in which the processes of mediated memorialisation have increased significantly - both in size and pace - compared to the first phase of the first Circassian revival (CR1) from the years just before and after the fall of the Soviet Union.<sup>35</sup> One example is the use of avatars - a graphic image representing a person who takes part in online discussions or, for instance, has a Facebook profile (could be a photo of the person but a different form of graphic image is often chosen). In case of the Circassians on the Internet, many of these avatars depict the flag or, traditional costume (the *cherkeska*) - i.e. nineteenth century representations have attained iconographic status within the renewed mediated Circassian

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<sup>35</sup> Could also be labelled re-enactments of the past - hinting at a type of performance of offline memory that has gained increased popularity at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

mobilisation. These avatars have become a very visible element of the Circassian revival and they also represent an expression of the importance of belonging to a Circassian group and identity.

## **Mobilisation**

In assessing the mobilisation of the so-called ‘Circassian movement’, I discuss how a civil society space for action can be understood in relation to the two different contexts of Circassian civil society action in Russia and in Turkey respectively.<sup>36</sup> The latter is supplemented by observations from the Circassian diaspora in general, as the level of transnational cooperation increases. This also indicates the increasing role of Internet-generated mobilisation, which is also included in the assessment.<sup>37</sup>

Pierre Nora has noted the following on how memory has become a part of mobilisation processes through his comments on the difference between ‘history’ and ‘memory’: “Unlike history, which has always been in the hands of the public authorities, of scholars and specialised peer groups, memory has acquired all the new privileges and prestige of a popular protest movement. It has come to resemble the revenge of the underdog or injured party, the outcast, the history of those denied the right to History.” (Nora 2002, 6). This is further underlined by Linda T. Smith: “Traditional indigenous knowledge is re-generating in spaces created by activism” (Smith 2012, 10)<sup>38</sup> although Smith also underlines the fact that “there is no easy or natural relationship between activism and research” (2012, 1).<sup>39</sup> Smith has defined an ‘indigenous research agenda’ that is “...moving towards the ideal of a self-determining indigenous world” in which self-determination constitutes a strategic goal (Smith 1999, 115). Smith further notes that: “Self-determination in a research agenda becomes something more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice which is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural and economic

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<sup>36</sup> The fact that the term ‘the Circassian movement’ is increasingly used - as seen in many Internet articles in recent years - illustrates the significant expansion of the Circassian revival (Zhemukhov 2012) and, potentially, also the element of ‘convergence’.

<sup>37</sup> And perhaps a short comparative conclusion on civil society development in Turkey and in Russia, as the heirs to two former Eurasian empires both currently undergoing ‘democratic transition’.

<sup>38</sup> Presented at the seminar ‘Indigeneity: Options and Strategies’ in Copenhagen, March 2012. Part of this paper appear in the revised version of ‘Decolonising Methodologies’ published in 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Linda T. Smith underlines the fact that the twin actions of research and activism are often carried out by the same person. While this type of twinning is increasing, the actual number of individuals that can perform these acts is often very few - particularly in relation to local communities (Smith 1999, 11). According to Smith, indigenous peoples are in need of support from think tank-type institutions that could support local research with potential transnational interest.

terrains” (1999, 116). In this ‘strategic research agenda’, self-determination as one ‘tide’ is a goal of an indigenous movement that is reached through three other tides: survival, recovery and development which, in the model, is supplemented by four ‘directions’, identified as decolonisation, healing, transformation and mobilisation (1999, 116).<sup>40</sup> The agenda outlined by Smith is based on the continued legitimisation of indigenous peoples’ rights and the accompanying activism that “suggests a possible space for indigenous peoples” (1999, 115). The two issues of mobilisation (on different geographical levels) and recovery, which constitute key elements of the model, are particularly interesting for the discussion of the Circassian mobilisation.

The role of civil society and space for action is discussed in relation to Russia and Turkey, respectively, which constitute two different contexts that, on the one hand, share a number of similarities in their processes of democratisation while, on the other, also outline two considerably different conditions for Circassian civil society mobilisation. What it is that makes this difference and how the increased space for civil society action in Turkey - and the rest of the Circassian diaspora world - affects the civil society mobilisation of Circassian organisations and initiatives in Russia are key aspects of the discussion. These discussions are informed by debates on the different understandings of civil society as a battlefield of interests versus the more consensus-oriented understanding often found in the West as described by David Lewis (2001, 2). As Lewis, according to an Antonio Gramsci-inspired approach, suggests: “Civil society is the arena, separate from state and market, in which ideological hegemony is contested, implying that civil society contained a wide range of organisations which both challenged and upheld the existing order” (Lewis 2001, 2). This indicates how and where the Russian and the Western understandings of civil society differ, which is further discussed in this thesis.

Habermas has stressed how new communication technologies “...render the creation of public spheres possible” (367 - my translation) in an extension of the above-mentioned discussion of ‘communicative action’ (under ‘Mediation’). Also Kraidy and Mourad (2010, 13) stress that ‘hypermedia space’ has become a site of social agency. In the case of the present phase of digital media technologies these new spaces for action perhaps represent, not just another intensification, but a leap to another level - qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

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<sup>40</sup> Smith stresses that these tides and directions are not necessarily sequential as the model might suggest.

Regarding the potential for social change and empowerment of civil society actors and marginalised groups through the use of the Internet, the terms ‘social capital’ and ‘cultural capital’ have increasingly become popular in academic writings and are, as such, briefly included in relation to the discussions of civil society mobilisation. It is apparent that an increased space for action, or increased bonding and/or bridging of social capital, can be the result of using the Internet - as illustrated, for instance, by the use of Facebook as a tool for transnational Circassian mobilisation. As, for instance, the young activists from New Jersey state, the use of Facebook has been a ‘revolution’ in their activities, whereby they can now approach Circassians all over the world, discuss issues of the Circassian revival and often end up linking with each other as friends - through individual Facebook sites as well as the sites of the organisation. These young activists often meet in the offices of CCI two or three times a week and perform these actions jointly - so the social offline face-to-face aspect is still important and motivating for this type of activism.

Another way of assessing Internet-generated mobilisation and empowerment is the so-called ‘V.E.R.A.city loop’ model developed by Maximillian Forte that is applied in the discussion of Internet-generated mobilisation among diasporas, indigenous peoples and minorities. This model of Forte illustrates how an Internet-generated mobilisation can be repeated again and again - henceforth labelled as a loop-function - through phases or processes of visualisation, embodiment, recognition and authenticity. These four issues are discussed in relation to the Circassian mobilisation, as all are relevant to the Circassian context. As a result of interviews and participation in Circassian events, I have identified ‘recognition’ as perhaps *the* single key-word that best describes the Circassian revival - albeit in a number of different understandings. The V.E.R.A.city loop model also illustrates the interconnectedness of the three key themes of mediation, memorialisation and mobilisation.

‘Grassroots globalisation’ or ‘globalisation from below’ is the basis for some of the key discussions in relation to globalisation and civil society action - and often includes a focus on the role of the subaltern and the marginalised: “...a series of social forms has emerged to contest, interrogate, and reverse these developments and to create forms of knowledge transfer and social mobilisation that proceed independently of the actions of corporate capital and the nation-state system (and its international affiliates and guarantors).” (Appadurai 2000, 3). This is especially relevant to discuss in relation to a dispersed people without the formal backing of a nation-state that is increasingly

engaged in transnational mobilisation. Arjun Appadurai further notes on “the vast array of grassroots movements” that has emerged around the world: “Many of these movements also consciously build on global possibilities; build on possibilities of linking up to other likeminded movements, and so on and so on. I see direct connections between democracy and globalisation, positively speaking, as people leveraging connections and networks” (Hawley 2008, 292).

The sociologist Saskia Sassen has coined the term ‘frontier zones (of globalisation)’ to designate a type of transnational border-crossing or networking cooperation that shares similarities with the developments within the Circassian civil society sector worldwide in later years. Issues and debates raised by civil society actors outside Russia have increasingly been shown to be able to affect the agenda in Russia - especially after the Georgian parliament chose to support a key Circassian civil society agenda in 2011 by recognising the Circassian genocide in the nineteenth century. The decision to hold the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi has also generated renewed transnational Circassian activity and has played an important role in facilitating significantly increased support for an understanding of forced exile as an act of genocide. This is perhaps the single most visible result of the increasingly transnational mobilisation among the Circassians - through mediated memorialisation and civil society action.

Digital activism according to Hilary Pilkington “is the way millions of people - especially young people - relate to politics in the twenty-first century” (Pilkington 2011).<sup>41</sup> Pilkington further concludes, based on research results: “The CivicWeb project concluded that ‘*young people who are active online are also active offline*’ and thus that the Internet civic sphere is best viewed not as a replacement for but a complement to offline civil and political action...” (Pilkington 2011).<sup>42</sup> These conclusions largely correspond with my findings among the diverse and geographically scattered ‘Circassian movement’, in spite of the different contexts they operate within.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hilary Pilkington refers to the Demos report ‘Digital Populism’ (published 07-11-2011). This survey, conducted by the British think tank Demos, was carried out in 11 European countries.

<sup>42</sup> Pilkington quotes from the following Civic Web report by Banaji, C., Buckingham, D., van Zoonen, L. and Hirzalla, F. (2009): ‘Civic Web Report: Synthesis of Results and Policy Outcomes’, available electronically at [www.civicweb.eu/images/stories/reports/civicweb%20wp11%20final.pdf](http://www.civicweb.eu/images/stories/reports/civicweb%20wp11%20final.pdf) (page 63). Hilary Pilkington further stresses that online activists are “not just armchair activists”.

<sup>43</sup> On the fear of ‘coloured revolutions’ in Russia, that today also includes fear of Facebook or Twitter revolutions, in Moldova 2009 and the role of Russia (russiablog.org 17-04-2009); and of civil society demonstrations and use of Internet mobilisation in Russia in December 2011 (russiablog.org 04-01-2012).

The Circassian revival illustrates the increasingly transnational character of civil society mobilisation while at the same time exemplifying some of the shortcomings or barriers this process is faced with. One example, for instance, was when the successful lobbying of and subsequent cooperation with official Georgian actors, which also included cooperation with a US think-tank, resulted in the cancellation of a large international Circassian conference in 2010 after pressure from Russia. Limited financial power is an obvious shortcoming in the Circassian revival, which can be seen when the two state actors of Russia and Georgian compete over the Circassian legacy along the Black Sea coast. The 2014 Sochi Olympics, which initially completely ignored Circassian history in the area, but has more recently allocated space to the Circassians in a less visible side-event as part of the folkloristic entertainment. This type of experience is known from many indigenous contexts whereby large-scale projects are used to further marginalise indigenous people, who were hoping for the opposite. Further south on the Black Sea coast - just south of the Abkhazian border - within just a year Georgia had erected the monument to the Circassian exile that Circassian civil society actors would have liked to see in the Sochi area. The Georgian government further established a Circassian Cultural Centre in Tbilisi with researchers and other staff members, who take part in further elevating Circassian issues on the transnational scene.

Since his re-inauguration as President of Russia in May 2012, Vladimir Putin has launched several initiatives restricting civil society action. A new law requires organisations that receive funding from abroad to register their activities formally as funded by ‘foreign agents’. In September 2012 USAID was forced to close down its operations in Russia - according to the Kremlin for “attempts to influence political processes, including elections of various types, and institutions of civil society through the distribution of grants”.<sup>44</sup> Fines for taking part in public demonstrations and other forms of public disturbance have also been raised significantly. Sergei Markov, prominent member of the Presidential Council for Civil Society, stated that foreign support for civil society development was both unwanted and un-Russian. These types of restrictions on the space for action within the civil society sector in Russia could also be used against Circassian organisations in the future, although actual funding from abroad has been limited. Still, these initiatives could serve to reduce the otherwise increasing efforts in the direction of transnational cooperation. A reduction in the space for action of Circassian civil society initiatives following the return of President Putin has been predicted by a number of Circassians. A few have suggested that the protests and demonstrations in

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<sup>44</sup> Chicagotribune.com (19-09-2012).



Russia - especially in December 2011 and in relation to the Pussy Riot court case in 2012 - represent cracks in Russian society through which future changes in the role of civil society might develop.

Russia is repeatedly seeking and winning the right to host international mega sports events - the Football World Cup in 2018 and Formula One racing events will both include Sochi in the future - and this will inevitably bring a renewed focus on human rights, freedom of the media and civil society. These events also offer Circassian activists engaged in the anti-Sochi campaign and other elements of the Circassian mobilisation an opportunity for continuing the protests and resistance in which they have gained experience in recent years. This is probably important, as experiences from other mega sports events show that, once the event has passed, the spotlight quickly dies out and actions of protest again have to return to more limited public spaces.

The process of civil society mobilisation among Circassian minorities in the two Eurasian states of Russia and Turkey, which both constitute former empires with a contested past vis-à-vis territorial minority groups such as the Circassians, is unfolding as part of ongoing but different processes of democratic development or transition. Both states formally underline the fact that they follow standards and practices from various European institutions such as the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union (only Turkey), but the Circassian minority context indicates the actual outcome of these processes. Discussing and assessing the Circassian minority contexts in the two countries offers an opportunity to compare and conclude upon these parallel processes.

### **Institutionalisation, Knowledge-Production and Geopolitics**

The institutionalisation of Circassianness as it has unfolded over the last two hundred years - the modern era - is a way of framing, understanding and discussing the contemporary Circassian revival that I find relevant and constructive. Partly because this is an analytical framework that can encompass the many different references to the nineteenth century by contemporary Circassian actors - including the contested issues and the displacement of the majority of the Circassian population. And partly because the nineteenth century was a period marked by the arrival of new

discourses on nations and nationalism based on ethnicity as territorially-based (nation-states), which little-by-little became the main ordering of the international system of states as large (European) empires began to disintegrate. The legitimacy attached to ethnicity, nation and nation-state was finally endorsed in the twentieth century by the post-World War I peace conference in Paris, including the principle of national self-determination as outlined by the American President Woodrow Wilson, and the rise of the United Nations after World War II as a successor to the League of Nations.<sup>45</sup> Later decolonisation and the fall of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia more or less completed this process - for a period at least. In the nineteenth century, especially in Europe, the principle of nation-building and nation-state gradually gathered speed - often in parallel with imperial competition for colonisation of non-European spaces. This was illustrated by the processes of 'Russification' during the nineteenth century, as well as by the British and others' perception of Circassia as an independent state/nation.<sup>46</sup> A few decades later, Britain ended up accepting the Russian conquest of Circassia in spite of protests from some British actors who contested the Russian interpretation of the 1829 Adrianople peace treaty, according to which Russia had won the rights to Circassia and not just the former Ottoman trading posts on the Circassian Black Sea coast, which they actually possessed. This also illustrates why geopolitics is relevant for inclusion in the discussion.

The process of institutionalisation of Circassianness over the last two hundred years is a process with significant shifts between continuity and change - both of which are important to include in the discussion.<sup>47</sup> It is not enough to focus on the major historical (or geopolitical) shifts, such as those which took place in 1864, in 1917/1922 (Russian revolution and civil war) and in 1991 (the fall of the Soviet Union) but also to discuss the institutionalised continuities.<sup>48</sup> One example is the fact that Circassian territorial units reoccurred after the establishment of the Soviet Union, which represented not just a geopolitical necessity for the Bolsheviks in order to ensure that these territories stayed

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<sup>45</sup> As noted by Robert Conquest, nationalism in the twentieth century became a dominant historical force (Conquest 2000, 242).

<sup>46</sup> Shifting - and sometimes competing - processes of 'Russification' and 'nativisation', respectively, were already unfolding in the nineteenth century and continued in different ways during the Soviet period, though never without an element of control and dominance from the imperial/Union centre.

<sup>47</sup> I have chosen to use the term 'Circassianness' instead of the terms 'Circassia' and 'Circassian', as it contain key elements of both. This is also inspired by Brubaker and his use of the terms 'nationness' and 'nationhood': "Instead of focusing on nations as real groups, we should focus on nationhood and nationness, on "nation" as practical category, institutionalised form, and contingent event" (Brubaker 1996, 7).

<sup>48</sup> As an extension of the continuity versus change binary, Brubaker discusses the need to include both continuity and events that can happen suddenly in the analysis of institutionalisation of nationhood or nationness - as something that *develops* and as something that *happens* (Brubaker 1996, 19).

within the Soviet Union but also signified a continuation of the legitimacy attached to the categories of native belonging.<sup>49</sup> This could be seen in the many republics that were established in the Soviet Union based on these principles since the 1920s. In parallel with the violent Imperial Russian colonisation of the Caucasus and the ensuing period of imperial integration in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Circassians and other North Caucasian peoples became part of a reformed and European-inspired administration and apparatus of scientific knowledge production that included ethnographic and geographical investigations of the Circassians and other North Caucasian peoples. This also entailed a number of new publications and a new Caucasian museum in the regional centre of Tbilisi, and supplemented knowledge production on Circassia and the Circassians that had already begun earlier in the century, when a number of different actors visited the area, and subsequently published books and newspaper articles in several different languages.<sup>50</sup> This was partly due to the Caucasus becoming a destination for adventurous travellers and writers of travelogues but especially illustrates how geopolitical concerns can generate wider interests in a European periphery otherwise absent from the European public spheres of the era. The type of legitimacy attached to Circassianness - both in the North Caucasus and in exile in the nineteenth century - is still relevant and reproduced today, including the alterations of the ethnic engineering of the Soviet period.

### *The Institutionalisation of Circassianness*

The institutionalisation of Circassianness - as the kind of modern ethno-territorial identity-building process and a process of categorisation and re-categorisation that is of interest to this thesis - has taken place since the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the discussion of institutionalisation of Circassianness, I draw upon the geographer Anssi Paasi and his models for the analysis of geographical-territorial identity building, supplemented by the sociologist Rogers Brubaker and his writings on the processes of institutionalisation of Soviet and post-Soviet ethnicity.

Many scholars investigating the former Soviet Union and the post-Soviet states apply a state-centred approach that often leads to misrepresentations of minority populations or simply ignoring

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<sup>49</sup> Kabarda was part of the independent Mountain Republic from 1918-1920.

<sup>50</sup> The Circassian part of the collection of the Tbilisi museum was shown at a special exhibition in Anaklia on the Black Sea coast in May 2012 in relation to the unveiling of the new monument to the Circassian genocide.

the minorities (and minority rights that are celebrated in other contexts). One example of a generalisation is when Taras Kuzio notes that eleven out of the fifteen post-Soviet successor states “...inherited peoples who had not yet acquired the attributes of what would be defined by political scientist and anthropologists as consolidated identities” (Kuzio 2002, 248). Although Kuzio does not specify which peoples he is focusing on, this statement is also an example of a potential misrepresentation of institutionalised ethnicity as a purely Soviet legacy and therefore potentially ‘false’ or in other ways ‘wrong’. Brubaker, Kuzio and others, in some of their analyses, are inclined to overlook and/or even act patronisingly in their analyses of the role of minorities.<sup>51</sup>

The relevance of categories such as being ‘indigenous’ are - just like the terms ‘diaspora’ or ‘minority’ - still new to many Circassians - and are regularly discussed at Circassian conferences and events. Linda T. Smith has noted in relation to the importance of belonging to the category ‘indigenous people’ that the term ‘people’ is just as important as the term ‘indigenous’: “It is regarded as crucial by indigenous activists because it is peoples who are recognised in international law as having the right to self-determination” (Smith 1999, 114). An increased legitimacy has generally and gradually been attributed to ‘indigenusness’ since the 1960s. Indigenusness has become a part of the ongoing Circassian memorialisation whereby the Circassians are often referred to as the ‘natives’ or the ‘native population’ in the different documents from the nineteenth century. This is also an illustration of the authenticity ascribed to being native or indigenous, which hints at a form of recognition.

The institutionalisation of Circassian as a category of ‘people’ or ‘ethnicity’ in Russia generally began through an initial categorisation via anthropology and geography - first as an army occupation, since as independent sciences. Then, in the Soviet period, these categories were generally upgraded and assigned to different levels in the hierarchy of territorial ethnic groups. Most of the different hierarchies were abolished in the contemporary Russian Federation, in which the three Circassian groups all constitute so-called ‘titular nations’ in federal republics. In a Russian context, the term ‘nation’ (natsia) can have a double meaning as both ‘nation’ and ‘ethnicity’. The

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Affirmative Action Empire’ by Terry Martin (2001) is one example. Interestingly, another book about roughly the same period is ‘The Great Terror’ by Robert Conquest (1968), which illustrates the broad spectrum of options when analysing the USSR in the 1930s. In 1970, Conquest published ‘The Nation Killers’ on the whole peoples that were deported during the Second World War (and became “un-nations”, disappeared from statistics and encyclopaedias). (According to Conquest, the relation to minority peoples became tactical, as the charges of disloyalty generally were a thin disguise).

term nation was already being used confusingly in the nineteenth century as referring to either ‘people’ or ‘(state-)territory’, but often without clarifying which definition was being used. This can still be the case today.

The identity categories of Circassianness and Caucasianness are overlapping and both are often used in the same sources. Circassianness is a part of Caucasianness, which is illustrated by the many websites that cover both Circassian and Caucasian issues and in which many of the themes are overlapping. This is, for instance, apparent in the visual representations from the nineteenth century, which illustrate how many aspects of folklore and legend are shared by the Caucasian peoples. In the words of Stuart Hall, it can be said that they all take part in “imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas” (Hall 1990, 224).

### ***Knowledge Production (and uneven geographies)***

As already indicated in relation to memorialisation and counter-memorialisation above, a discussion of the so-called ‘power-knowledge nexus’ - as considered by authors such as Edward Said, Michel Foucault, Derek Gregory and many others - is at the heart of the Circassian revival.<sup>52</sup> Historical knowledge is rediscovered, retrieved, reproduced and used to challenge the contemporary power-knowledge nexus that exists in Russia in a form of resistance that resembles Rehnuma Sazzad’s description of how Edward Said turned his exile into “an intellectual exile of resistance” - although not all Circassians are in exile (Sazzad 2008, 1). Many elements of these processes have already been discussed above, so the important role of knowledge production in relation to the Circassians, today as well as historically, will briefly be addressed here.

In his book ‘The Colonial Present’, David Gregory stated: “We need other ways of mapping the turbulent times and spaces in which and through which we live” (Gregory 2004, 12). Gregory stresses the need for ‘contrapunctual geographies’ and argues for a new need for analysis of the

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<sup>52</sup> Rehnuma Sazzad writes about Edward Said as a Palestinian in exile, “who transforms the pain of physical separation from” the “native land into a privilege of intellectual freedom” (2008, 1) - or as the subtitle of the paper puts it: “resistance through revealing the power-knowledge nexus” (Sazzad’s comments on physical exile becoming an intellectual exile of resistance have similarities to the many Circassians becoming involved in knowledge and information generation as part of resistance).

‘colonial present’ in which ‘memory’ plays a key role (Gregory, 9).<sup>53</sup> Gregory argues that his analysis of these processes can be understood according to a scheme of ‘colonial amnesia’ and ‘colonial nostalgia’ cross-cut by ‘culture’ and ‘power’ (his figure 1.1: ‘Memory and the Colonial Present’), which can be used as a “rough and ready template” for tracing “the arts of memory that play an important part in the production of the colonial present” (Gregory, 9). Gregory further notes that “...the arts of memory have always turned on space and geography as much as on time and history” (Gregory, 11) - as Gregory further states in relation to the celebration of the “new transnational cybernetics” (Jameson in Gregory, 11), which according to Gregory, “imposes its own unequal and uneven geographies” (Gregory, 12). These forms of ‘unequal and uneven geographies’ are also relevant to discuss in relation to the Circassians and Russia - not just in taking into consideration the one-sided domination but also in looking at how this affects Circassians in their acts of resistance and protest as well as the general processes of identity-building. The approach of ‘unequal and uneven geographies’ includes a discussion on similar issues by Edward Said, Linda T. Smith and others in relation to marginalised and often colonised groups and territories. This leads to a discussion on the theme of geopolitics in the following.

In spite of the Orientalist tendencies of both Russian and Western actors producing knowledge about Circassia and the Circassians in the nineteenth century, several ambiguities and disagreements were included in this knowledge production, and these play an important role in the ongoing reconstruction of Circassian identity. This has, for instance, been reflected in the reactions towards the enforced 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007 of the voluntary Circassian-Russian unification - celebrations that was cancelled ten years earlier after being rejected as ‘false’ by a committee of historians. The element of ‘unequal and uneven geographies’ is further stained by the regular references to terrorism in the North Caucasus region in Russia as well as in the rest of the world - as described by Gregory above. This is also used in relation to Circassian activists and also towards, for instance, environmental activists criticising the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games, historians investigating the nineteenth century Russo-Caucasian Wars etc.

The geopolitical competition in the nineteenth century resulted in a space for Circassian voices that reached the public spheres of Europe and other parts of the world, in a period where public opinion

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<sup>53</sup> ‘The Colonial Present’ is inspired mainly by the Western reactions towards Islam or the Middle East, Afghanistan and Iraq in the aftermath of 9/11 2001.

and public spheres were attaining new roles in these societies.<sup>54</sup> This is the period of increased production of newspapers and journals that Anderson labelled print capitalism. In spite of being able to voice their concerns to the outside world, Circassia still ended up being colonised by force, with large numbers of Circassians killed or sent into exile. To the Russian Empire, this was not only a victory over the last of the fiercely resisting Caucasian mountain peoples but also a geopolitical victory. This was the victory that settled the so-called Eastern Question in favour of Russia<sup>55</sup>, which was part of the reason behind the large celebrations of the 1864 victory - both in 1864 and again in 1914. Power, in the end, settled the score but, as we can see from today's Circassian revival, the significant amount of knowledge generated in the nineteenth century - partly due to the geopolitical competition that made the Circassian Question into an issue of international concern - today plays a key role in the Circassian revival. Not only are the voices of the Circassians reproduced and recirculated - albeit mainly through reports from, for instance, British agents and other visitors to Circassia in the nineteenth century. Sources found in Imperial Russian archives are now particularly used to document Circassian history, including the many incidents of what would today be called war crimes, ethnic cleansing or attempted genocide. In other words, Circassian voices were not fully 'silenced' in the nineteenth century, although the final victory of Russia resulted in a near 'silencing'.<sup>56</sup> I will argue that this case of being only 'partly silenced' has proven to be significant in relation to the Circassian revival today, together with the evidence from the Imperial Russian archives that now functions as important elements of the revival of a 'Circassian voice' today. The use of imperial archives in research and documentation has today become part of an empowerment of Circassian civil society actors in a continuously reproduced and renewed mobilisation - in a manner similar to Linda T. Smith's analysis of the wider process of indigenous people's revival.

### ***Geopolitical Reconfigurations***

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<sup>54</sup> This was also illustrated by the role of civil society organisations that worked for the promotion of the Circassian Question - Circassian committees were established in France, Ottoman Turkey and Great Britain (including in Scotland). This was a parallel to the more well-known anti-slavery efforts by civil society organisations active in many countries during this period. (During the 1990s, in a similar manner, a number Chechen support committees were established around the world - especially after Russia began the war in December 1994).

<sup>55</sup> For instance according to Russian newspaper articles from the period.

<sup>56</sup> The Circassians may have avoided being fully silenced due to the geopolitical competition surrounding their Caucasian location along the border zone between Asia and Europe. Much of the contemporary voicing of Circassian issues is based on complaints about being more or less silenced and ignored - or misrepresented - for almost 150 years.

The role of memorialisation in the Circassian revival is largely a protest against official Russian versions of Circassian history and identity. The generation and presentation of knowledge, documentation and information from the nineteenth century is at the centre of these activities. Much of the mentioned material can be found in Russian archives, though access is still limited. However, much of the contemporary Circassian civil society research illustrates an attempted ‘reversal’ or ‘countering’ of a colonial process, where, for instance, colonial archives from different empires are today used by the colonised or the marginalised in a process of mobilisation. As illustrated by access to Imperial Russian archives in Georgia, this process also has geopolitical implications whereby the increased tension between Georgia and Russia following the war in 2008 has generated a renewed Georgian focus on the peoples and republics of the North Caucasus. This is, on the one hand, an illustration of how minorities and indigenous people are often dependent on other actors in geopolitical games or simply risk becoming victims of the actions of bigger players. On the other hand, it also illustrates how these post-2008 changes in the geopolitical configurations in the Caucasus have made it possible for Circassian organisations from third countries to successfully lobby for access to archives and for recognition of the Circassian genocide. The latter case is also an illustration of how a ‘frontier zone (of globalisation)’ as defined by Saskia Sassen can function and an example of how local or transnational actors can become actors in geopolitical games, as emphasised in the ‘critical geopolitics’ by Tuathail and others.

For parts of the Circassian movement, future Circassian independence is seen as the long-term goal. This is often voiced at various demonstrations and other events - and on the Internet. Other Circassians are primarily working for increased Circassian rights or self-determination, for increased repatriation, or for the creation of a joint Circassian republic in the North Caucasus. In the diaspora, especially in Turkey, there are still many who would like to see the multi-ethnic North Caucasian Mountain Republic of 1918 reappear in one form or another.<sup>57</sup> The formal Georgian recognition of the Circassian genocide and the partnership between Georgian and Circassian organisations also marks a geopolitical reconfiguration whereby a new Caucasian position that includes elements from the Russian North Caucasus is challenging the traditional Russian dominance. The use of the Imperial Russian archives located in Tbilisi as part of this process illustrates the element of a power/knowledge reconfiguration. Still, the use of scenarios of a future independent Circassia is angering parts of the Russian establishment and has been used by

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<sup>57</sup> This idea still has some support in the North Caucasus, although the lack of success of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples in the Caucasus in the first part of the 1990s has diminished this support.



politicians, the media and others to paint a picture of enemies hostile to the federation and its territorial integrity.

Both Russia and Turkey are undergoing processes of repositioning as major powers and geopolitical players in the Eurasian sphere, which is also attracting interest due to the rising role of China, the conflicts in the Middle East and the transportation of oil and gas.<sup>58</sup> In these games of international politics, the region of the Caucasus and its peoples has often ended up getting squeezed or on the losing side due to the interests of other players. This was particularly evident during the final rush for full colonisation of the globe in the nineteenth century, which is a key period in the contemporary Circassian memorialisation and mobilisation process. For the machinery of the expanding Russian Empire - a machinery that in the nineteenth century no longer only consisted of simply the military but also included modern administration and science - Circassia constituted a blank spot on the map. Still, the geopolitical competition secured an international attention for several decades in the nineteenth century. Whether the Sochi Olympics will be able to do the same in the 21<sup>st</sup> century still remains to be seen.

The Circassian Question in the nineteenth century referred mainly to the potential survival of Circassia as an independent country. As such, the Circassian Question became part of the Eastern Question, which largely consisted of British - and some others as well - fears of Russian expansion and potential further dominance in Asia. This was one of the biggest issues in international politics of the period and has since also been known by names such as the Great Game or the Victorian Cold War. In Russia, the final victory in the Caucasus in 1864 resulted in different forms of celebrations and these sentiments were illustrated by a Moscow newspaper that declared that the Eastern Question had now once and for all been settled in favour of Russia.

## Methods

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<sup>58</sup> Russia is one of the so-called BRIC-countries representing mainly non-European states with rising geopolitical influence and members of the G-20 group of the most powerful and dominant states in the world. The rising economy and increased role of Turkey in relation to, for instance, the Middle East would make Turkey a potential member of both groups but Turkey is widely regarded as a future EU member and geopolitically often regarded as 'European' or 'Euro-Atlantic' due to its membership of the Nato alliance.

The chapters constituting this thesis consist of individual papers that all, in differing ways, address the ongoing Circassian revival. It is the purpose of this introductory chapter to establish a joint methodological or theoretical skeleton joining the papers together. I have two different overall thematic approaches to this process - one has emerged during my research into different aspects of the Circassian revival and the other I have had in the back of my mind as a potential theoretical framework that all or most of the papers could link up to from the beginning - partly because I have used theories on institutionalisation of territorial or ethnic identity previously. The other approach has become my internal 'guide-line' for the three M's that roughly cover my research: the transnational Mediated Memorialisation and Mobilisation of the Circassians.

I have worked in and with the Caucasus for almost twenty years - in between other jobs, including several years of working with civil society networking across borders in post-war ex-Yugoslavia. I have experience from several longer periods of fieldwork in the North Caucasus region during the 1990s and have a network in the region that I have drawn upon in relation to this project on the Circassian revival. I have spent several periods in the Circassian parts of the North Caucasus and observed parts of the first post-Soviet Circassian revival at the beginning of the 1990s before the authorities took control of the organisations. Ever since, I have been aware that a renewed Circassian revival, such as the one that is presently unfolding, would at some point take place. I collected materials, conducted interviews and talked to a number of people who were active participants in the first post-Soviet Circassian revival, and this has formed a part of my preparations for the research found in this thesis. Caucasian minorities have been at the centre of most of my prior experiences in the region, although the outbreak of several violent conflicts changed the focus to also include refugees and internally displaced persons - and the so-called ethnic conflicts.

When I began to follow the Circassian revival more closely from 2008 on, it was still being mainly noted by only a few beyond those interested in Caucasian affairs and generally passed under the radar of different national public spheres - including Russia. Still, in various Caucasian public spheres - including on the Internet - the renewed level of activity among Circassian civil society was clearly visible. The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics in particular has, since the decision in 2007, been used by Circassian actors to develop an increasingly visible platform for action and information dissemination - a process that picked up speed especially after the end of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics.

It increasingly became clear that many of the themes that could be discussed in relation to this revival actually touched upon a number of key contemporary tendencies. These themes were often referred to as ‘turns’ and illustrated the fact that the Circassian revival was a timely issue to investigate. The Circassian revival can be assessed or analytically approached as an intersection of different ‘thematic turns’, such as the ‘diaspora turn’, the ‘memory turn’, the ‘civil society turn’, the ‘mediation/media/mediatic turn’, the ‘indigenous turn’, the ‘geopolitical turn’, the ‘identity turn’, the ‘nation branding turn’, the ‘spatial turn’ etc. In the end, it is perhaps the ‘global turn’ of the contemporary processes of late modern globalisation that can encompass a discussion of many of these contemporary turns.

The key methodological elements of my research process have been: interviews with key actors (mainly within civil society organisations<sup>59</sup>); field visits; observations (including both formal and informal occasions); conference participation (arranged by both Circassian/Caucasian organisations and academic institutions in different countries); participation in organisational meetings (including planning of events); presence at events; collection of materials; website pages of organisations and other Circassian/Caucasian websites, including social media; various other media representations of the Circassian revival.

My main working language in interviews has been English, supplemented with some German and Russian. The dispersed nature of the Circassian World has resulted in a language barrier whereby there are still many organisational representatives that have limited English skills; however, a young activist or relative was usually able to assist. I have collected material from organisations in several different languages, including Russian and Turkish in particular. During the period 2008 to 2012, many organisations began to offer materials through their websites, which are often relatively newly-established or have been significantly upgraded during my period of research. Similarly, the number of documents translated and made available in the English language has risen significantly and this also includes articles on Circassian issues generally available on most of the websites. This

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<sup>59</sup> Since my initial focus was on the Circassian diaspora, I have interviewed more representatives from diaspora organisations than organisations in the Caucasus. Another reason is that I wished to pass ‘under the radar’ of the intelligence services that follow the activities of many of the Circassian organisation in Russia (and sometimes also abroad) - mostly due to future intensions of working in Russian Caucasus, for instance in relation to the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.

is to a large extent due to the arrival of a new generation of 'digital natives' who often also possess English language skills.

My field visits to different Circassian contexts that were most relevant in generating an understanding of the renewed Circassian mobilisation were: Istanbul, Turkey (x4); Düce, Turkey; New Jersey, USA (x2); Amman, Jordan; Damascus, Syria; Brussels, Belgium (x2); Berlin, Germany; Hamburg, Germany; Sochi, Russia (x3); Maikop, Russia (x3); Nalchik, Russia; Saint Petersburg and Moscow, Russia; Tbilisi and Anaklia, Georgia. Beyond these field trips, I have been in contact with representatives from other Circassian places such as, for instance, Israel and France, during conferences and other events. I have not been in contact with the relatively visible Circassian organisations in Australia and California but I include some of their material in my chapters. Nor have I not been in contact with the Circassian organisations in Egypt and Libya which - together with Syria - suddenly became visible during the Arab Spring of 2011.

My main research focus has been on the recent trends and especially the post-2005 developments, with the establishment of new organisations and with a multitude of new Internet initiatives appearing. Some of the older organisations and their events have, however, been included in order to give a fuller picture of the Circassian diaspora development. This is also due to the fact that many of the new organisations refer to the lack of initiative on the part of the older organisations as part of their motivation for starting up new organisations and getting involved. Since my entry point has often been the new organisations, this has led to a certain level of hesitation, suspicion or reluctance from representatives of the older ones. Many of these, for instance in Turkey and the Middle East, often rejected labelling their efforts as 'political' and insisted that their organisation or association only focused on Circassian 'culture'. This is in line with the general approach of civil society organisations of ethnic or religious minorities for many decades - for instance in Turkey. This has been particularly noteworthy among the local organisations, while representatives from nationwide organisations such as the federal Circassian association in Turkey, Kaffed, have become more outspoken and also stressed their role as politically-oriented organisations acting on behalf of the Circassians in Turkey. This also illustrates how the new possibilities for political action among ethnic minorities in Turkey are also facing internal conservatism and carefulness that is often grounded in experiences from earlier periods and which can potentially lead to a form of self-

censorship. It is this pattern that some of the youth activists and organisations often declare themselves to be acting against in particular.

The Internet has, first and foremost, functioned as a source of information which, to a large extent, is very similar to going to a library. Compared to my work in the Caucasus in the 1990s, the conditions for collecting information have changed radically. The material available on the Internet has not only supplemented the interviews and the material collected in the region but has also constituted valuable sources that used to be difficult to obtain through the type of pre-Internet media available. The use of social media sites has increased significantly during my period of research, and most of these sites are open and available, and therefore easy to include in my assessments.

Two kinds of conferences have played an important role in my research: conferences arranged by Circassian or Caucasian organisations (mainly among the diaspora) and academic conferences held in academic institutions at different locations. The academic conferences have functioned as a way of testing various arguments, hypotheses and potential thematic understandings or approaches to the study of the Circassian revival. Such conferences also function as professional networking opportunities and have, on some occasions, generated interest in the publication of papers including, some of the chapters of this thesis. It has also been important for me to experience different locations that are important to the Circassians and the challenges they face in the planning and implementation of activities, including conferences. Both in the Turkish and in the Georgian context, conference organisers complained of a lack of interest on the part of many Western scholars who are often uninterested or cancel their participation (after the programme has been printed). There has been a widespread understanding at several of these events that locations such as Turkey or Georgia are still not fully accepted in contemporary European academia - which often appear to prefer a Western or Anglo-American orientation in conferences. Another challenge for academic conference organisers in Turkey came from, for instance, members of the public and from a specific Circassian/Caucasian organisation that repeatedly phoned and wrote to conference organisers to complain that the word 'genocide' is not being used in their posters and other material advertising the conference. They claimed this was equal to not recognising the Circassian genocide, despite this issue actually forming part of the conference.

Many Circassian events either include a conference or have the organising of a conference as their main object. The holding of conferences is one of the key activities for several of the Circassian and Caucasian organisations - especially within the Circassian diaspora, where the knowledge on a number of Circassian issues is still considered to be inconsistent or lacking (although this situation has improved considerably since 2005). At conferences, the positions of a number of key organisations and persons were often presented - and sometimes discussed. Participation in such conferences has given me valuable input for my research and has often included additional interviews with the organisers or speakers. Attending conferences often led to an opportunity to visit organisations and observe their premises - although not all organisations have their own premises - but organisational visits always contribute to a more concrete picture of the organisation and enable you to meet activists, board members, librarians etc. On several occasions I was able to observe various activities, collect written or printed materials such as brochures, newspapers, newsletters etc. and was introduced to various organisational functions.<sup>60</sup> I have on several occasions been able to use the libraries and archives of some of the organisations - partly to obtain new or additional information and partly to gain an understanding of the general content. The three foundations in Istanbul and Ankara, in particular, have unique collections sometimes dating back to the period before the forced exile from the Caucasus as well as from the early years of the exile.

Many of the Circassian organisations are run on limited financial budgets and often depend on volunteers to act as activists, teachers, librarians etc. and many meetings and interviews therefore had to be conducted in the evening or during the weekend. In some cases, I had to meet the representatives first and have my intentions and background questioned before a level of trust was established. Afterwards, I often experienced very friendly and helpful assistance. Sometimes it was helpful when my earlier writings were known to the organisational representatives - some of which had been uploaded and circulated on the Internet without my knowledge, sometimes also translated into other languages. I have on several occasions given a lecture at a local organisation or university in return for visiting and interviewing representatives of organisations. To me, this has been a fair deal and also gave me valuable input in terms of obtaining feedback to my assumptions and ideas as well as generally observing the kind of discussions that followed.

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<sup>60</sup> This has included taking photographs as part of my internal mini-mapping of the different Circassian events and spaces around the world, which includes a focus on how Circassianness and Caucasianness are visually represented. 'Circassiana' or 'Caucasiana' are often sold at Circassian and Caucasian events, which is part of my overall investigations into the Circassian revival, where I have especially focussed on visual representations of the nineteenth century - and particularly how these are reproduced/digitalised and circulated on the Internet.

Shifting the national fields or contexts from paper to paper - chapter to chapter - has been a constant challenge when analysing, generalising, concluding etc. In the diaspora countries, the main focus is on Turkey, where by far the most Circassians are today found and many initiatives are potentially pointing in new directions for the 'Circassian movement'. The Turkish context is discussed in Chapter 3. The American and European contexts will be used shortly to illustrate different approaches to civil society mobilisation compared to countries such as Turkey and Russia, where the space for action within the civil society sector is still relatively new to many - especially ethnic minorities. The Russian context has become more important to include since the renewed Circassian mobilisation from 2005 on, in which claims of genocide and other calls for 'recognition' now address today's Russia far more than was the case before. The Russian context of the Circassian republics is therefore especially dealt with in Chapter 2, but is also part of the discussions in Chapters 4 and 5. As mentioned earlier, I visited fewer civil society organisations in Russia than in the diaspora, for a number of reasons. Instead I visited Circassian villages along the Black Sea coast where I also carried out mini-mappings of Circassian spaces, partly to test the allegations of many in the diaspora that all traces of Circassianity had been erased there. On my second visit, I did similar mapping exercises to look for potential changes. This can be seen in the paper/chapter on the role of the Sochi Olympics in the Circassian revival. I also interviewed representatives of research institutions and magazines specialising in Circassian/Caucasian issues, and visited libraries and interviewed environmental organisations in the Sochi area.

This thesis is primarily written from a minority perspective. This is not the same as taking 'sides' - in any case, different positions are often found within minority groups. I do not see my research as promoting minority issues and agendas, which is something that I have, from time to time, been accused of: "Would it not be better if you just left them alone?" and "then they would stop complaining and not create conflicts in the future." I believe this kind of allegation, that my interest - together with that of others - could lead to increased Circassian activism or even radicalism, is mistaken and erroneous. The fact that minority issues have been either ignored or misrepresented for long periods is actually a driving force behind much of the civil society mobilisation. I have met somewhat similar reactions from individuals - for instance, within academia - who insinuates that people like me may be promoting nationalism, which is generally seen as negative without much further attention to the context in question. I find such suggestions non-historic as many of these

academics previously supported processes of decolonisation as well as the fall of Communism - though both processes were dominated by national claims and nationalism. Such comments and suggestions almost endorse the instalment of a kind of 'silence' towards minorities such as the Circassians, which is actually one of the key issues addressed in the Circassian revival. Protests against being silenced - today as well as historically - are at the centre of this revival and, for many Circassian actors, constitute the main motivating factor.

A multitude of studies that have analysed ethnic groups and minorities from a state perspective can be found - also in the case of Russia and Turkey. Some of these, for instance, recommend the abolition of ethnically defined republics in Russia or suggest replacing ethnic and cultural identities such as those found among the indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus with a new form of Russian civic citizenship. However sympathetic or idealistic such suggestions appear to be, they also show a lack of understanding of the situation in most of the ethnic peripheries of Russia, which most of these writers have never visited. This is a dilemma often facing minority groups - especially in countries such as Russia (and Turkey). This type of debate is found both within Russia and among various specialists from outside Russia. This to some degree resembles the understanding found among many writers, researchers etc. in Russia, many of whom have never actually visited the Caucasus but still voice or repeat prejudices and stereotypes about the region. I have often been met with surprise when I have informed people from, for instance, the central parts of Russia about the details of the minority situation in the North Caucasus. There is therefore a strong need for a minority perspective that focuses on issues of equal rights, discrimination etc.

## **The Structure of the Thesis**

There are many both thematic and geographical overlaps in the different chapters, as all investigations behind these papers were driven by a curiosity to understand the sprawling Circassian revival as it has developed in various local and national contexts as well as transnationally. I have tried to avoid overlaps and repetitions but since most papers were written independently before this thesis was planned this is not fully possible, as I have chosen to maintain the published papers in their published form. Some parts of the chapters constitute shorter papers such as, for instance,



conference papers or other forms of draft papers that has been updated, as I find them relevant and useful for the themes of the chapter in question.

The papers that make up the chapters, as well as the structure of this thesis in general, reflect the fact that some of the papers are written from a similar perspective but set in different geographical contexts, as seen in Chapter 2 on the Russian context of the North Caucasus (Hansen 2012) and Chapter 3 on the Turkish context (Hansen 2013a). In both cases, civil society development - and especially the development of new organisations with new kinds of activities, the use of the Internet and the new role of youth activism - is at the heart of the chapters.

Chapter 2 on the Circassian context of the North Caucasian republics in Russia represents an attempt to discuss and assess the new civil society initiatives - especially offline - as representations of Circassian minority groups in the North Caucasus. This includes observations on the relationship between non-governmental and governmental institutions in the three republics in which the Circassians formally constitute titular nationalities. This also constitutes an assessment of potential minority-majority reconfigurations in Russia around twenty years after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Chapter 3 on Circassian civil society development in Turkey represents an exercise partly similar to Chapter 2 on the Russian context albeit without the same need to discuss relations with the authorities.<sup>61</sup> The main focus of this chapter is on the development dynamics within the steadily enlarging and dynamically-changing Circassian - and Caucasian - civil society sector. This entails a focus on a new type of politicisation of civil society actions which challenges the traditional approaches of the older organisations or associations. Differing understandings of the role of culture and politics are at the heart of some of the discussions and negotiations. An additional focus is on the trend towards increased transnational cooperation.

Chapters 4-6 (Part III) are about the (contested) process(es) of institutionalisation of Circassianness in general over the last two hundred years - the modern era. Contrary to some representations, particularly in Russia, I argue that Circassia and the Circassians were not just subject to but also took active part in the introduction of modern narratives and agendas many decades before the final Russian colonisation of 1864. It is the aim of these chapters to try and establish a framework by

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<sup>61</sup> A short analytical paper that functioned as the starting point of this paper, can be found in the Appendix.

which to understand a process of institutionalisation of geographical-territorial identity under shifting and often contested conditions. The starting point for these chapters was the ongoing process of virtual re-territorialisation of Circassia and Circassian identity on the Internet that I have labelled as ‘iCircassia’ - Internet-Circassia (Chapter 6). Chapter 4 is an introduction to the historical context of the nineteenth century, which is needed in order to understand the many historical references to this period within the contemporary Circassian revival.

In Chapters 7-9 (Part IV) on mediated memorialisation and mobilisation, the focus shifts towards three key cases that illustrate the actions and priorities of the Circassian organisations and the Circassian revival in general: ‘May 21 (1864)’, ‘Genocide Recognition’ and ‘Sochi Winter Olympics 2014’ (Hansen 2013b). Here, especially, Circassian culture and memory play a key role as reflected in my 3M catchphrase of ‘mediated memorialisation and mobilisation’. Different approaches to the use of the Internet in new processes of memorialisation and mobilisation - often both at the same time - are the main focus of several of the papers. This includes a focus on the use of new features of Web 2.0 such as Facebook and YouTube in the combined efforts of Circassian memorialisation and mobilisation. The focus on memorialisation includes a discussion on Circassian vernacular memorialisation and counter-memorialisation as key elements of the Circassian revival.<sup>62</sup>

## ABSTRACTS OF CHAPTERS

### ***Chapter 2. The North Caucasian Context in Russia: Renewed Ethnic Mobilisation among the Circassians in Russia***

The renewed ethnic mobilization among Circassians in the North Caucasus region in Russia that has unfolded since the latter half of the 2000s is illustrated by the establishment of new civil society organizations and a substantially increased number of Internet-based initiatives. All of this reflects a new and increased form of agency and unity among the Circassians in which youth activism has played key role. It also illustrates how Circassian civil society actors and cyber-activists have not

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<sup>62</sup> Two papers on the 2010 campaigns for the creation of a joint Circassian Republic in Russia and for establishing Circassian as a joint category of the 2010 all-Russian census, respectively, have not been included in this thesis. As is the case with two shorter papers on the role of geopolitics. The chapters of part III have been shortened to fit the format.

only been able to establish a counter-public sphere or develop a new space for action, but also increasingly have been able to move key issues from Circassian spheres into the wider public sphere of mainstream Russian media and politics. The upcoming 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, in particular, has functioned as a lever in this process, which has also resulted in increasing support among Circassians for calls for recognition of the nineteenth century forced expulsion of the majority of the Circassians from the Caucasus as an act of genocide. In this manner, a mega-event such as the Sochi Olympics has contributed to generating a more radical or politicized understanding or framing of the Caucasian exodus that, since the fall of the Soviet Union, has generally been known as “our national tragedy”. The million-strong and geographically dispersed Circassian diaspora have undergone a similar civil society and Internet-based mobilization since the mid-2000s, which includes increased transnational communication, coordination, and cooperation.

### ***Chapter 3. The Turkish Context: Frontier Zones of Diaspora-Making: Circassian Diaspora Organisations in Turkey***

It is the overall aim of this article to discuss the ongoing revival among the Circassian diaspora through a discussion of the recent developments among Circassian diaspora organisations in Turkey. Turkey is a key country for the Circassian diaspora, with a figure of somewhere between 2 and 5 million Circassians, i.e. more than 90% of the Circassian diaspora. The relatively new space for action within the civil society sector in Turkey has resulted in Circassian actors taking part in an increased politicisation of Circassian issues, in which a number of relatively newly-established organisations have emphasized their opposition in relation to the older and more established organisations. This politicisation also represents a polarisation in which a relatively new and greater diversity can be observed among the Circassian diaspora.

The combination of youth activism and the Internet, in particular, has resulted in the creation of new public spheres that function as platforms for future actions - including elements of transnational coordination and cooperation. This is illustrated by the campaigns for genocide recognition and against the 2014 Sochi Olympics. The increased transnational cooperation among the Circassian organisations is discussed through the theories of Saskia Sassen on the development of (transnational) frontier zones (of globalisation).

### ***Chapters 4, 5 and 6 (Part III): Circassia, Territoriality, Institutionalisation and Virtual Reterritorialisation***

The three chapters are inter-connected in different ways as illustrated, for instance, by the discussions of ‘territoriality’. The presentation in Chapter 4 of key themes of the nineteenth century prolonged process of Russian colonisation of Circassia serve not just as a presentation of the key themes of the initial institutionalisation of Circassia in a modern understanding under conditions of geopolitical competition. It also relevant in order to understand the role of nineteenth century representations in the Circassian memorialisation process as it unfolds on the Internet. The themes include the role of the Russian army, officers and Cossacks; the literary invention of the Caucasus; geopolitical competition; the development of Caucasiology in relation to science and colonial administration.

In Chapter 5, I discuss how the model for territorial institutionalisation, developed by the Finnish geographer Anssi Paasi, according to which the development over time of key elements of the geo-spatial identity of an area can be assessed. This includes the role of maps, administrative units, borders, names, territorial symbols including flags etc. It also includes an element of contestedness.

In Chapter 6, I investigate ongoing virtual re-territorialisation of Circassia on the Internet which, I find, is easier to understand on the basis of discussions of the Chapters 4 and 5. I suggest to apply the term ‘digital capitalism’ as an update of the terms ‘print capitalism’ and ‘electronic capitalism’ used by Benedict Anderson and Arjun Appadurai, respectively, to assign earlier periods of mediated mobilisation among nationalities - with or without a nation-state. In the case of the Circassians this is not just exemplified by the many different Circassian websites but also by the Circassians’ use of social media such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter (Web 2.0) - transnational and (partly) interactive by definition. A concrete empowerment of Circassian actors through the Internet is taking place. This illustrated how the development of ‘digital capitalism’ has both quantitatively and qualitatively new implications for a dispersed people such as the Circassians compared to earlier periods.

### ***Chapters 7, 8 and 9 (Part IV): Three cases of Mediated Memorialisation and Mobilisation in the ongoing Circassian Revival***

The three chapters reflect the three issues that, I argue, together make up a strong triangle of ongoing and accelerating Circassian revival: May 21 (1864) as the annual Circassian day of remembrance (Chapter 7), recognition of the Circassian genocide (Chapter 8) and the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics (Chapter 9). It could be argued that these issues in combination have come to encompass the ‘when’, ‘where’ and ‘what’ of the Circassian revival.

In Chapter 7, I argue that the year ‘May 21<sup>st</sup> 1864’ has acquired a central role in the ongoing Circassian revival with the recent consolidation of the ‘when’, ‘where’ and ‘what’ of this process. The May 21 commemoration events, with its focus on 1864, make up the ‘when’, the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics constitutes a ‘where’ (as well as a ‘when’) - while ‘genocide recognition’ finalises this triangle of continuously ongoing and accelerating Circassian revival through the establishment of the ‘what’ (as this issue increasingly has become a headline in this revival process) – focus on one of the three issues almost automatically enhances the others. I further argue that, in a process that began before the fall of the Soviet Union, the year 1864 has gradually become institutionalised as a so-called ‘defining moment’ in the contemporary Circassian identity.

Re. Chapter 8: Since 2005, when Circassian civil society organisations began to apply to the Russian authorities for recognition of the Circassian genocide, this issue has constituted a key topic of the renewed Circassian mobilisation. At first initiated by Circassian Congress from the North Caucasus but soon also supported by Circassian/Caucasian organisations outside Russia. Most of these were newly established and had genocide recognition as one of their key priorities. The issue gained speed in the recent years, when it became the subject of several conferences and increased Circassian lobbying. Among the Circassians, the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics has played a key role in reformulation of the ‘national tragedy’ of the forced exile into an act of genocide. In 2011, the Circassian genocide was formally recognised by the Georgian parliament. The increasingly successful campaign for ‘genocide recognition’ has resulted in turning this issue in perhaps the most central ‘headline’ of the Circassian mobilisation - in tandem with the facilitating role played by the ‘2014 Sochi Olympics’. I argue that, since I generally conclude that ‘recognition’ in a broader

understanding is perhaps the single phrase that best of all encapsulates the Circassian revival, 'genocide recognition' can be seen as a way of speeding up the quest for recognition.

Re. Chapter 9: In the Circassian revival, as it has accelerated since 2005, the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi has increasingly attained a role as an 'enabling event'. Sochi was the location of the last Circassian parliament before the final exodus of most of the Circassians from the Caucasus in 1864. For many Circassians May 21<sup>st</sup> (Day of Remembrance) and the 2014 Sochi Olympics now link to the forced exile in both time and space. 2014 also marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Krasnaya Polyana - fifty kilometres from Sochi - is the mountain area where the skiing events will be held. Krasnaya Polyana was the place where the Imperial Russian army held its victory parade in 1864, on May 21<sup>st</sup>. The Circassian choice of Day of Remembrance was from the outset chosen to pinpoint a specific space and time. In the course of these processes, the year 1864 has been established as a defining moment and I argue that Sochi has been established as a site of long-distance memory (Pierre Nora) among, primarily, the Circassian diaspora. In my paper, I further discuss how the issue of the 2014 Sochi Olympics has affected recent May 21<sup>st</sup> commemoration events and the role of memorialisation on the Circassian counter-Olympic websites.

## **Overall Conclusions of the Thesis**

I have introduced Circassia and Circassian in various aspects: their geographical region and diaspora, their organisations as well as their cultural revival. I have introduced the term iCircassia in order to introduce a distinctly new Circassian arena. In my research, I have illustrated how processes of mediated Circassian memorialisation and mobilisation are closely interconnected. All of these three themes represent processes that, in the case of the Circassian revival, have shown to be not only overlapping but also mutually reinforcing of each other.

I conclude that it is relevant to speak of a '*digital capitalism*' that is both qualitatively and quantitatively different from the earlier phase of 'electronic capitalism' (as discussed by Arjun Appadurai and others in the 1990s). This is, to a considerable degree, due to the features of social sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, often referred to as Web 2.0, which have proven useful in empowering minority groups and individuals such as the Circassians in new ways that are

markedly different from earlier periods. As can be seen in the case of the Circassians, these issues of the three Ms can generate new forms of action and activism that potentially can mobilise and include participants on a much larger scale than before. In other words, this illustrates the 'network nature' of the Internet, including its strong potential for participation instead of the passive spectatorship that characterised the former phases. The increased vernacular or popular involvement represents an element of empowerment, illustrating the strong potential for combined *mediated* memorialisation and mobilisation. In the case of the Circassians, this is also true for a relatively marginalised minority dispersed across many countries as diaspora groups. In spite of the various forms of obstruction used by the authorities to counter the Circassian revival, these efforts appear to be increasingly difficult. This is due not least to the fact that an increasing part of the Circassian activities can unfold or be shared across borders.

The print capitalism and electronic capitalism of earlier periods were also transnational but the new possibilities of remediating and recirculating content through the Internet have hugely changed the accessibility of knowledge, which in the case of the Circassians plays a significant role. Much of the reproduced, remediated and recycled material is actually a product of the former periods of print and electronic capitalism that has been digitalised.

As seen in the case of the Facebook-revolution outlined by the young Circassian activists in New Jersey in Chapter 4, the Internet can be used to reach out to other Circassians not otherwise involved in Circassian activities. This is a way of establishing links that can be further developed and used strategically in future actions. It is also an easy way of spreading information to other Circassians while at the same time confirming the links and connectedness, which also represent new forms of community building.

The YouTubian memorialisation that has become a significant part of the mediated Circassian mobilisation shows how information and dissemination of knowledge can be performed in a relatively professional - or at least semi-professional - manner on a low budget. This is exemplified by the illustrated history lessons uploaded in different languages via YouTube and which are subsequently recommended, recirculated or commented upon by viewers - often with an integrated use of, for instance, Facebook. Another example is the message from one the activists in New Jersey in a viral video circulated ahead of the annual Day of Remembrance of May 21<sup>st</sup>, where he

states his recommendation to fellow Circassians: 'Read, Read, Read'. This is perhaps the most straightforward illustration of the close links between mediated Circassian memorialisation and mobilisation possible. Reading on today's electronic Web 2.0 media involves much more than words in books and articles. The visual aspect has become predominant. This marks a shift in the processes of identity building or mediated memorialisation and mobilisation that is still too early to envisage fully.

The reverse of the coin are the hostile and even hateful statements or reactions so widespread on many social Internet media platforms. There are many nationalistic manifestations - both from the side of the Circassians and opponents to the Circassian revival. 'Stupid nationalism' (in this case referring especially on websites in Russia), as one informant put it, is so widespread that, for him, it had turned into a demotivating factor that had contributed to reducing his involvement in Circassian civil society organisations in Turkey. This illustrates some of the difficulties of the revival process and how quickly it may convert.

Regarding the 'total archive', the 'essential repository' or the 'database character' of the Internet, this as a feature that clearly distinguishes this phase from the two earlier phases of print and electronic capitalism (Andersen). As noted by Brinkerhoff, the Internet can function as an essential repository of information about the homeland, information that was previously not always easily accessible. Through hyperlinking it is easy to move further into the sources used or move on to related websites. This represents a 'flattening of knowledge hierarchies' that is part of the above-mentioned element of empowerment. This is a new form of knowledge generation that will be further discussed in relation to the role of the digitalised archive on memorialisation below.

Beyond the database character of the Internet, which makes it highly applicable to an information and knowledge-based revival such as the Circassian, the Internet in general - and the features of Web 2.0 in particular - also functions as a network in which connecting is a central element. Henry Jenkins refers to this aspect as a 'networked culture' characterised by 'spreadability', where he particularly stresses the potential role of 'influencers'. This illustrates the way in which Circassian activists - individually as well as within organisations - use the Internet as part of a strategy of both spreading information and generating further mobilisation. All of which jointly and simultaneously marks a significantly increased and renewed negotiation of Circassian identity.



Concludingly, the shift towards digital capitalism, and the features of Web 2.0 in particular, also represents a more transnational, global or cosmopolitan outlook compared to the earlier phases, during which the mediation context was generally more state-centred. I will argue that we are witnessing a profound change or shift in the form and practice of mediation with the arrival of Web 2.0, which has significant consequences for memorialisation and mobilisation, as the case of the Circassian revival illustrates.

The renewed Circassian *civil society activity* has generally gathered pace significantly since 2005. It has, for instance, radically increased the space for action in Turkey and Russia, where civil society action had been restricted for minority groups such as the Circassians. (In spite of the anti-government demonstrations and upheavals experienced in both countries during 2012 and 2013.) It is nonetheless clear that, as a territorially defined minority group living along the borders of the state, the Circassians in Russia are under a different form of pressure and counter-reaction from the authorities (formally as well as informally) than the Circassians in Turkey. Such pressure has temporarily managed to reduce the level of activity of the Circassian civil society sector in Russia - offline - while it appears not to affect online activity, which has continued to unfold. The new laws that recently give the Russian authorities further possibilities of closing down parts of the Internet, such as for instance YouTube, may reduce the activity but, judging from experience so far, this would only lead to a momentary decline in activity because, more often than not, new options are sought and tested. On the other hand, this could force activists into becoming cyber-activists to a much greater degree than before. Offline activism in physical space in the North Caucasus does, however, still appear to be needed in order to push forward certain agendas. While it might be necessary to keep a low offline profile for a period, this is obviously not a feasible long-term strategy when the overall purpose of activities is to achieve changes in the conduct of the same authorities. And yet the latter years have shown that key individuals from the Circassian organisations have had to leave the area for shorter or longer periods due to threats and other forms of pressure. Accusations from, for instance, politicians and media representatives that Circassian activism is (potentially) promoting terrorism has become another regular element that Circassian minority activists have to live with.

The role of the New Jersey organisations and activists as frontrunners in the Circassian movement is partly due to the less-restricted opportunities for civil society action and partly because of the inspiration they draw from other diaspora *mobilisation* initiatives and processes such as the Jewish and the Armenian, both of which have illustrated the value of lobbying and alliance-building. Lobbying played a significant role in the process of gaining support for the recognition of the Circassian genocide by the Georgian parliament in 2011.

The increased space for civil society action in Turkey has also played a key role in the transnational Circassian civil society mobilisation. It is here that the largest annual May 21<sup>st</sup> commemorative events, as well as demonstrations, take place and this has gained increased significance as the planning is coordinated with organisations in other countries and both videos and photos are immediately shared through the Internet. Organisations in Turkey have, together with representatives from American organisations, been the driving force behind the ‘No Sochi’ campaign and website. The fact that organisations in Turkey are often ‘Caucasian’ before ‘Circassian’, while still prioritising Circassian issues, has frustrated some of the organisations in the other countries, where only ethnic Circassian issues form the focus. A couple of new organisations in Turkey with a purely Circassian focus have appeared recently but it is still too early to assess whether they will be successful.

The youth organisation Caucasian Forum has been one of the frontrunners in the second Circassian revival since 2005. This was initiated among students in Istanbul with an international outlook and awareness of international trends regarding the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples. The youth focus made it relevant to use state-of-the-art ICT tools in their operations and their visibility - also through, for instance, the annual May 21<sup>st</sup> demonstrations - has contributed to gradually attracting more youth activists from other parts of Turkey.

*Memorialisation* has been an integral part of the Circassian mobilisation since before the fall of the Soviet Union - it is difficult to describe one without mentioning the other – and, as such, these processes mutually reinforce each other. Circassian memory - and the rediscovery thereof - has been a part of the development of a counter-memorialisation as a form of resistance or protest against official Russian history writing, which many Circassians regard as discriminatory - and which they still find actively performed in relation to the 2014 Sochi Olympics. This encompasses

the establishment of a new narrative on the Circassian tragedy of forced displacement, especially since 2005, which includes a different kind of victimisation to before by directly targeting the Russian Federation as the heir to the Russian Empire: the focus on recognition of the Circassian genocide. This is indirectly supported by actors in other post-Soviet countries that have similar complaints against Russia and, especially, official Russian history writing. The Circassian counter-narrative is increasingly supported by documentation from nineteenth-century archives and a growing number of these elements are gradually being acknowledged by researchers, writers, bloggers etc. in Russia as well as internationally. These processes have played a significant role in motivating activists to become involved and have generated increased support for the Circassian revival in general.

This resistance and counter-memorialisation unfolds in a context of competing memorialisation that has been enhanced with the increasing role of the Internet, which generally is widening the gap between official historiography in Russia and local peoples of the North Caucasus. Some examples of this are, for instance, monuments and names of Russian generals such as Yermolov, Lazarev etc. These play a role in the increasing production of both Kuban spatiality and Circassian spatiality. Another example is the Kremlin-initiated 450-year celebrations of 2007 that resulted in new large monuments in the key Circassian cities of Nalchik and Maikop. These, however, are contested by other large monuments erected during the last ten years that communicate a Circassian counter-narrative.

The discussions on the process of the *institutionalisation* of ‘Circassianness’ over the last two centuries - as inspired by Anssi Paasi and Rogers Brubaker - has illustrated some of the links between the contemporary Circassian revival and the historical development of Circassianness through various phases. This can function as a framework for identifying and understanding at least key parts of the contemporary memorialisation efforts within the Circassian revival. As can be seen from Chapters 4-6, Circassianness is and has been institutionalised on a number of different levels, and has been reproduced, and thereby survived, through seven generations of exile - under conditions that have varied strongly from country to country. This will to maintain a Circassian identity during the many years of exile illustrates a significant dedication to Circassian culture and identity in general, which was relatively easy during the many years of compact living in villages where they could use the Circassian language and Circassian traditions across several generations.

In the Circassian homeland in Russia, the institutionalisation process has been affected first by the Imperial Russian and then the various phases of the Soviet period, whereby the establishment of the Circassian titular republics with Circassian names had a key role to play, not least because this also meant some form of privilege for Circassian language teaching in schools, and publications and research into specific Circassian issues in the Circassian language. As I have shown, all of this is part of the foundations without which the contemporary revival would not be able to take place.

Allegations that Circassian identity (and ethno-cultural-national projects) is mainly the result of Soviet ethnic policies, including not least the titular republics in the indigenous homelands in the North Caucasus, have repeatedly been voiced. This reflects a tendency to expand the importance of certain elements of the Soviet period both inside Russian society at large and within Russian as well as international academia. This could be interpreted as patronising or discriminating towards minorities such as the Circassians. The discussions on the institutionalisation of Circassianness indicate some ways of illustrating this. It is still a minority challenge in Russia - and not least in the North Caucasus - for Circassians to be able to voice their own perspectives and understandings without being subjected to superficial and often irrelevant understandings of being 'too feudal' or 'too clannish' or simply 'too Caucasian'. Actors both inside and outside contemporary Russia have, on several occasions, suggested the abolition of the ethnically defined republics as a way of generating a future civic and democratic Russia. For minority groups, however, such suggestions can generally be regarded as an extension of patronising approaches - in spite of often being based on a desire to promote democratisation and avoid ethnic conflict. In general, the desire to label Circassians and other Caucasian minorities as feudal etc. - while a certain level of cultural conservatism can be observed - is yet another example of the largely unfinished Russian encounter with the imperial past in the region as well as the contemporary myths on Caucasians that repeatedly circulate in the Russian media and are often accompanied by xenophobic statements.

New actors can achieve status as *geopolitical* actors as a result of reconfigurations related to late modern globalisation processes, including the potential empowerment of transnational groups and individuals through the use of the Internet. New forms of transnational alliances can be built between new kinds of actors, as illustrated in the process of the Georgian recognition of the Circassian genocide in 2011 and the subsequent continued efforts from the Georgian side to support the Circassian movement (though this is not equally welcomed by all Circassians).

The new Georgian role in relation to the Circassians illustrates how the Caucasus has once more become a zone of geopolitical competition - and, as in the nineteenth century, Russia also today plays the role of the dominant player. It is still questionable as to whether the alliances of some Circassian organisations with Georgia will prove successful in the long run, as the history of the Caucasus has often shown how indigenous minorities can suddenly become dispensable in the eyes of more powerful actors. Still, the rights of indigenous peoples all over the world are being increasingly recognised, which could also - in the long run - serve to not only legitimise but also to strengthen a continued Circassian revival.

I argue that a triangle of Circassian revival through the gradually successful institutionalisation of May 21<sup>st</sup> (1864) as the annual Circassian Day of Remembrance since the fall of the Soviet Union (a) on top of which two other issues have more recently been added: Genocide Recognition (b), and the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics (c). This triangle of Circassian revival illustrate how the three issues have become connected and reinforce each other in a constantly ongoing process whereby inputs for one issue immediately affect and enhance the others. I further argue that this triangle continuously reproduces and reinvigorates the Circassian revival in a process with the overall aim of achieving wider recognition of Circassian identity and history. It is this search for 'recognition' as an historical indigenous people of the north-western Caucasus that I find sums up the combined Circassian efforts most accurately.

In the first period of the post-2005 Circassian revival, there was a reluctance to seek recognition of the Circassian genocide but, over the last couple of years, the issue has become a key headline or catchphrase of the Circassian revival. This is probably partly due to the appeal of a simplistic understanding that is based on a way of interpreting other similar tragedies such as the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide. The Internet has played a role in this process, where for instance social media often function through short messages presented more or less in headlines. To others, it is more or less the opposite: that a lot of material can now be read on the Internet which documents the Circassian tragedy of the nineteenth century in great detail, in a way that is emotionally affective, and which can thus lead to renewed support for genocide recognition. It appears as if many of those Circassians who were initially against the genocide recognition agenda have,

somewhere along the road, accepted that this is a strong vehicle for mobilisation, and one that could ultimately lead to the form of wider recognition they are seeking.

The issue of genocide recognition could potentially challenge the Circassian movement in ways that are not always discussed publicly. To become too entrenched in the issue of genocide recognition as the key issue of the Circassian revival could threaten to stall or delay the revival - because Russia may not recognise the genocide for many years to come. Many of the post-2005 activities are strongly set on this ambitious agenda but I will argue that all the other and diverse aspects of the Circassian revival are just as important for the continued success of the Circassian movement. In spite of the recent dominance of genocide recognition within the Circassian revival there are still many for whom '*recognition*' remains the important part of 'genocide recognition'. Still, the issue of genocide recognition has proved to be appealing and has led to increased involvement among Circassians.

The importance of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics as a large international mega sports event in relation to the transnational Circassian mobilisation cannot be exaggerated. The Sochi Olympics have offered the Circassian activists a platform for action and information dissemination that otherwise would not have been possible to establish. The Olympics have also played a role in the decision of the Georgian parliament to recognise the Circassian genocide. The significant and successful promotion of both issues within the Circassian World, as well as in various national and transnational public spheres, has to no small degree been due the mutual interconnectedness of the two issues.

A challenge facing the Circassian movement will be how to maintain the dynamics of the present mobilisation process after the 2014 Sochi Olympics. To a certain extent I believe that the Circassian movement has grown so extensively and become sufficiently diversified and transnational that the mobilisation can be expected to continue - in spite of potential post-2014 setbacks. The two new sports events planned to take place in Sochi - the 2018 Football World Cup and the Formula One annual racing events - also constitute international mega events. This will present the Circassian activists with future possibilities for linking in with the international attention generated by these large sports events.

Concerning the challenges of activism in relation to an authoritarian regime, it can be said that the response has often been repression - for instance in Russia, through the use of 'invisible' actors often with connection to the intelligence services, of which there are several in Russia, and which have departments in the republics of the Caucasus. Violent attacks and killings of Circassian activists and other key individuals within the wider Circassian movement are believed to be connected to the Russian intelligence services and mostly constitute unsolved crimes. Circassian youths (like youths in other parts of the North Caucasus) regularly complain of harassment from representatives of the police and other governmental institutions to the extent that they often feel they have to leave the area: for other parts of Russia, for places abroad or for the mountains (to join the insurgents). Circassian activists generally state that they will have to await a future democratisation of Russia in order to achieve significant goals such as increased repatriation from the diaspora or perhaps the establishment of a joint Circassian republic in the North Caucasus.

The Circassian revival can be termed a form of resistance to the power-knowledge configurations which have existed, in different forms and adaptations, in the relationship between the dominant Russian/Soviet/Russian state and the Circassian minorities/diaspora. Knowledge production is at the centre of the Circassian revival and is reaching further audiences. In the coming period, an increasing number of examples of recognition of Circassian history or elements thereof over the last two centuries or more can be anticipated. For instance, from researchers both inside Russia and internationally, through new publications and other forms of media representations. There is a strong element of legitimacy attached to being an indigenous people with a Caucasian homeland. This kind of authenticity is increasingly recognised through the growth of tourism in the wider Sochi area, as illustrated by the success of the Circassian village of Bolshoi Kichmay, where thousands of tourists learn about Circassian history and historical relations to the area on a daily basis, while being entertained by professional dancers from the inland republic of Adygea to huge applause. If the aims of a future for the wider Sochi area as a tourist centre attracting tourists from all over the world then this means that a number of individuals, and not just in Russia, will be informed about Circassian issues from Circassian perspectives. This is a (potential) offline impact that could be just as important as many of the online efforts, but especially important as an addition to the Circassian revival, from the heart of the historical homeland.

Historical documentation is not just a key element of the process of working for the recognition of the forced Circassian exile as an act of genocide but also functions as a vehicle for continued Circassian memorialisation and mobilisation in general. For many Circassians, this form of generating documentation on Circassian history in the nineteenth century - which today can easily be presented, visualised and made accessible to audiences - is part of a general education into a history that had previously often primarily consisted of fragments, and an addition to a memorialisation that has sometimes been based more on myth than on actual historical knowledge. Both a 'hidden history' and a 'mythology of victimisation' can function as strong motivating factors in mobilisation processes, but not least also within the wider processes of redefining Circassian identity.

Regarding the three issues of the recent Circassian movement that have been named as joint goals (Zhemukhov 2012): repatriation, the creation of one joint republic and recognition of the Circassian genocide, I have already discussed the latter. Repatriation to the homeland in the Russian North Caucasus has proved not to be attractive to most Circassians in the diaspora, which highlights a paradox or a contradiction in the Circassian movement, as this is often mentioned as a priority at Circassian events. This has led to 'repatriation' increasingly being linked to the other issue of creating a 'joint Circassian republic'. According to some, a joint Circassian republic would make it much more attractive to repatriate from the diaspora. At the moment, very few Circassians actually wish to live in the Russian Federation, where they would have to speak Russian instead of Circassian and which they regard as too corrupt and authoritarian a regime to live under. Some - and it would appear an increasing number of - Circassians take this argument one step further by stating that only a free and independent Circassia would attract proper repatriation from the diaspora - as well as being able to protect and develop the threatened Circassian culture and language. Nonetheless, the increased long-distance cultivation of the historical homeland appears to continue in the diaspora. And since many Circassians have lost their immediate family connections to the homeland, they could be anticipated to continue to use the Internet sources to develop this aspect of belonging to a digital diaspora with both a virtually accessible homeland and a physical space - the geographical homeland in the Caucasus - which might continue to be experienced as relatively inaccessible for a considerable time. In any case, the level of knowledge of Circassian history and memory - both among the Circassians themselves and beyond - is constantly increasing, including knowledge of the homeland. This is also a way of increasing homeland relations although



for some the options of a virtual return may be enough and thereby potentially discourage actual repatriation.

The terms social capital (and/or cultural capital) have been applied to illustrate how the element of linking - connectedness - can be developed against a background of cultural identities that have been largely 'dormant' or 'internally oriented' for decades if not centuries. This has proved a basis for both bridging and bonding on a whole new level and significant social capital has been developed in the process.

The Circassian side-stories to the Arab Spring since 2011 illustrate how sudden violent events can render minority groups such as the Circassians vulnerable, but also how these groups have been re-established within the wider Circassian World in a different way to before. This is not least due to the visibility generated by the Internet, where this type of sub-story can find space. This marked the closer inclusion of part of the Circassians in Egypt and Libya who are the descendants of the Mamluks who, centuries ago, played a key role in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East but originally came from Circassia and other parts of the Caucasus.

Much of the Circassian revival is still largely unfolding under the radar of the wider public - albeit much more visible than before. A much wider Circassian World and Circassian Movement has been established (in all its sprawling transnational diversity). A process that has established a Circassian frontier zone (of globalisation) - or perhaps rather a number of different frontier zones is unfolding - sometimes connected, sometimes not - through the diversity of the many Circassian activities that have increasingly become transnational. Hopefully my articles, conference papers and chapters have contributed to increase the understanding of contemporary developments among the geographically dispersed Circassians, as minority groups from/in the Caucasus.

Finally, the increased circulation of the terms 'the Circassian Question', 'the Circassian Problem', 'the Circassian Issue', 'the Circassian World', 'the Circassian Movement', the Circassian this-or-that - together with the many Circassian sites on the Internet - all more than indicate that the Circassian revival has evolved onto another level altogether. This is in spite of the potential humiliation of being labelled a 'question' or 'problem' by someone else - as underlined by Linda T. Smith. For the Circassian revival, this is mainly a consideration of theoretical relevance.

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## **Part II**

## *Chapter 2*

### **Renewed Circassian Mobilization in the North Caucasus**

In recent years, a new and significant type of unity and coordinated action has appeared among Circassian organizations across the three republics in the North Caucasus where Circassians constitute titular-nationalities: Adygs in Adygea, Kabardians in Kabardino-Balkaria, and Cherkessians in Karachai-Cherkessia. New Circassian organizations and Internet media have been established and have managed to involve many Circassians in their activities - especially since the mid-2000s. The arrival and spread of social media in Web 2.0, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have contributed to the increased involvement and visibility of Circassians in the North Caucasus. The aim of this paper is to discuss the ongoing Circassian mobilization, as represented by the actions of Circassian organizations supplemented by Circassian Internet activities, i.e. recent tendencies within the civil society sector of the region that signal a request for or suggest increased democratization (from below). In this process the role of youth and the Internet appear to be significant. All these activities represent a new type of unity compared to earlier period, when the Circassian organizations mainly operated within their own republics and in relation to the local republican power structures. Both the republican and the federal authorities have often reacted with hostility to the organizations and many of their proposals have been rejected, ignored, or have resulted in different forms of harassment including severe beatings and threats against the family.<sup>63</sup>

In the analytical context of this paper, I will use the term “ethnic mobilization”, as this is a term that has achieved widespread usage, though the militaristic connotations sometimes affiliated with the term “mobilization” can make it challenging for use in a Caucasian context that has become internationally known for violent conflicts. The word “ethnic” has often been affiliated to these conflicts and, when combined with “mobilization”, this could appear self-explanatory - or be misused as such (Dragadze 1998). The Circassian mobilization is multidimensional; it is not just ethnic, but also, *inter alia*, cultural, indigenous, and minority rights-oriented. Some Circassian examples from Turkey will be included as they have been undergoing a significant process of civil

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<sup>63</sup> According to the news agency *Natpress*, nine cases of attacks against Circassian leaders, including killings, were recorded between October 2009 and May 2010 (*Natpress.net*, 13-05-2010).

society reform starting more than ten years ago and several million Circassians live in Turkey - compared to 700,000 in the North Caucasus - and are in a process of becoming organized also beyond Turkey.

This study of the Circassian civil society mobilization in the North Caucasus is an empirical study based on the recent developments in the region. However, the paper is part of a larger study of the ongoing transnational revival among the Circassians analyzed according to an overall conceptual framework on ethnic and territorial institutionalization over time. The two main overall conceptual notions behind this paper are, firstly, post-Soviet civil society development and, secondly, the role of a so-called “nationalizing state” in relation to national or ethnic minorities.

The first theoretical or conceptual approach to the analysis of the Circassian revival consists of a discussion of civil society development as part of a post-communist process of democratization, where “space for action” will be discussed in relation to the recent Circassian civil society developments. The developments among the Circassian organizations and Internet-based initiatives largely unfold within the civil society sector. The analysis in this paper of the new initiatives is an attempt at understanding the character of this apparently new (or enlarged) space for action within civil society in Russia. The actions of the Circassian organizations in Russia at large have mostly been confined to the public spheres of the three Circassian republics but, for instance, the arrival of and increased access to the Internet in Russia has contributed to greater visibility and influence beyond the public spheres of these republics as well.<sup>64</sup> The public spheres in which civil society organizations in Russia operate have been going through phases of both expansion and contraction during the last 20 years of economic and democratic transition. Two different understandings of civil society development outline the discussion in this paper: on the one hand, the understanding of civil society as a battlefield and, on the other hand, a more consensus-oriented understanding of civil society representatives in interaction with the state and the market in the making of democratic societies. The first version seems to be most appropriate in the (semi-)authoritarian context of the Russian Federation, including the role of potential counter-publics.

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<sup>64</sup> The use of the term “public sphere” is inspired by, among others, the writings of Jürgen Habermas (Flyvbjerg 1998) and the subsequent discussions and criticism of his use of the term, including the term “counter publics” that is relevant to the Circassian context.

The second theoretical approach in this paper consists of reflections by Rogers Brubaker on the “relationship nexus” between ethnic minorities, such as the Circassians, and a “nationalizing state”, such as the Russian Federation. Brubaker stresses the importance of the dynamic character of this relationship. The fact that Brubaker has developed the term “nationalizing state” as part of an analysis of the post-communist context renders this term particularly relevant. In this theory, Brubaker operates with a triadic relationship nexus consisting of the nationalizing state, the ethnic minority, and the external homeland. As the latter part is not relevant in the case of the Circassians, I will discuss whether the Circassian diaspora can be said to be in the process of taking on the role of the third element in the relationship nexus, as the transnational contacts are increasing and the agendas set by the Circassian diaspora organizations increasingly penetrate into the general public sphere in Russia. The suggestion of David Smith (2002, 9) to further enlarge Brubaker’s model into a quadratic relationship nexus in order to include the role of international treaties, institutions, and organizations is also relevant to include in relation to the context of the Circassians in the North Caucasus.<sup>65</sup>

## **The Circassian Question**

The term the Circassian Question has lately managed to enter the wider public sphere of Russian mainstream media, following a number of years of circulation in the transnational sphere of the Internet.<sup>66</sup> Particularly in connection with the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014 that – especially since the end of the Vancouver games in 2010 – has drawn wider attention in the Russian media. In Russia, Sochi is often referred to as the “Summer Capital (in the South)”, as the president and the prime minister spend several months there every summer and often receive international guests. The area was colonized by the Russian Empire after a prolonged war over many decades in the nineteenth century, which resulted in the exiling of most of the Circassians. Sochi has become a place of significant symbolic value for many Circassians as this was the last place in the historical homeland the Circassians left in 1864 after losing the war (Jaimoukha, 2001: 67). This understanding of Sochi has become widespread in recent years, especially through the Internet. The last battle took place by the in a mountain valley in the vicinity of Kbaada village, which is 50

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<sup>65</sup> The discussion on the nationalizing state by Rogers Brubaker can be supplemented by considerations on “ethno-national dominance” (Andreas Wimmer), “asymmetric power-relationship” (Ralf Rönquist) and “asymmetric ethno-federalism” (Richard Sakwa).

<sup>66</sup> The term the “Circassian Question” is sometimes referred to as the “Circassian Issue” or the “Circassian Problem”.



kilometres from today's Sochi. This is where, on May 21, 1864, the Russian Army performed its victory parade. The location of Kbaada is today known as Krasnaya Polyana, where the alpine skiing events of the 2014 Winter Olympics will take place. The Olympic Games in Sochi will thus encapsulate vital elements of time and space in Circassian mythology or cultural memory - the final loss of the homeland in 1864.<sup>67</sup> Due to the Sochi Olympics, the Circassian Question has been elevated to a higher level on the international scene—as a parallel to the situation in 1864 when international media followed the war in Circassia.<sup>68</sup> One of the key achievements of the transnational Circassian movement since the fall of the Soviet Union is the institutionalization of May 21-the date of the Russian victory parade in the Kbaada valley in 1864-as a joint annual day of commemoration.

The Circassian Question was a term that also gained significant international use in the nineteenth century when the media, especially in Europe and North America, followed the lengthy Circassian war against the invading Russian Army (though back then the term mainly referred to the potential survival of Circassia as a homeland of the Circassians). In spite of the widespread use of the term, the Circassian Question is rarely defined. According to one recent definition, the Circassian Question of today consists of three main elements: recognition of the nineteenth century war and forced exile to the Ottoman Empire as an act of genocide, repatriation from the diaspora to the North Caucasus, and the establishment of a joint Circassian republic.<sup>69</sup> Some organizations and

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<sup>67</sup> One element of the renewed Circassian Question is the renaming of the war in the nineteenth century into the Russian-Circassian War (1817-1864) instead of the Caucasian Wars as is the term used in Russia (including a shorter period).

<sup>68</sup> Articles on the Circassian Question include, for instance, Polandov (2010). Political scientist Sergey Markedonov stressed the role of the Sochi Olympics in 2014 as a reason for the rise of the Circassian Question ('Parliament of Georgia asked to recognize Circassian Genocide in Russian Empire', *Caucasian Knot*, 22-03-2010, [eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/12871](http://eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/12871)). According to Hasan Dumanov, acting head of a division within the Kabardino-Balkarian Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Science, there is no Circassian problem in Russia - 'it is all imposed on us' ('Dumanov: there is no Circassian problem in Russia' (in Russian), *Caucasian Knot* (18-11-2010); The 'Circassian Question' has become a separate entry at the top of the list of content at the Circassian website *Elot.ru* called 'Why the Circassian Question became special' (*Kommersant.ru*, 18-01-2011). See also *Elot.ru* (25-03-2011) for a Russian conference on the Circassian Question.

<sup>69</sup> Sufian Zhemukov and Alexander Bekshokov, 'The authors of "Circassiad 2012" are against the decision on land in the KBR' (in Russian). *Natpress.net* (06-11-2009). Zhemukhov refers to these three issues as the strategic goals of the Circassian movement (Zhemukhov, 2012: 505). According to an analysis of Zhemukhov, five main strands of the contemporary Circassian movement can be identified with nationalists at one end of the spectrum, proceeding to sovereigntists, centrists, and culturalists, and ending with accommodationists at the other end (Zhemukhov 2012, 511).

activists go one step further and declare their ultimate goal as the re-establishment of Circassia as an independent state.<sup>70</sup>

During 2010 the Circassian Question received increased international attention following new interest from neighbouring Georgia. This was widely regarded as a reaction to the war with Russia in 2008 and Russia's subsequent recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.<sup>71</sup> This led to the so-called "war of conferences" in 2010 where two state-sponsored conferences in Tbilisi focussed on the Circassia genocide in particular, supplemented with other claims of genocide of the North Caucasian peoples.<sup>72</sup> As a result of the first conference-called 'Hidden Nations, Enduring Crimes'—an appeal was forwarded to the Georgian Parliament with a request for a formal recognition of the Circassian genocide.<sup>73</sup> The conference and the appeal generated strong reactions from Russian politicians and media.<sup>74</sup> Georgia is staging a politicized revision of its history with and within the Russian Empire, which has parallels to related processes in, for instance, Ukraine in the second part of the 2000s.<sup>75</sup> Another Georgian initiative in 2010 was to establish a visa-free regime for Russian citizens registered as residents of the North Caucasian republic, which was labelled as a provocation by the Russian side.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> 'On line conference with the chairman of the Circassian Congress in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, Ruslan Kesh' (in Russian), *Elot.ru* (16-08-2011).

<sup>71</sup> The Georgian reorientation towards the North Caucasus-or towards a united Caucasus approach as it is sometimes called – has been noted on many occasions since 2010, for instance, by (then) President Mikheil Saakashvili in a speech at United Nations General Assembly in the fall of 2010 and at the opening of the *PIK* Russian language television station broadcasting from Tbilisi in February 2011. ('Georgians build ties with Russian Caucasus', *Geotimes.ge*, 14-02-2011).

<sup>72</sup> Sufian Zhemukhov, 'Ponars', *Eurasia Policy Memo* 118 (October 2010).

<sup>73</sup> *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7 (58), *Jamestown.org*, 25-03-2010. The conference has its own Wikipedia-entry under 'Hidden Nations, Enduring Crimes conference', Wikipedia. Retrieved: 25-11-2012.

<sup>74</sup> When an academic conference on the Circassian Question was held in Moscow in March 2011 it was automatically presented by mass media as a Russian input to the war of conferences, though the organizers rejected this. The conference was arranged by the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. ('Circassian issue: history against politics', *Georgiatimes.info*, 29-03-2011. Zhemukhov (see note 12, *supra*) lists further Russian reactions, including linking Circassian activism to potential terror threats against the Sochi Olympics.

<sup>75</sup> A large-scale international Circassian conference was planned to take place in Amman, Jordan in 2010, which was intended to follow-up on the issues discussed in the Tbilisi conference, was cancelled, allegedly due to pressure from Russia towards the Jordanian authorities according several representatives from Circassian/Caucasian organizations in Jordan.

<sup>76</sup> 'Georgia eases visa rules for North Caucasus residents', *Cacianalyst.org*, Oct 27,2010, available at: <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5438>. U.S. President Barack Obama and representatives of the American administration expressed displeasure with the Georgian interest in the Circassian genocide and demanded that president Mikheil Saakashvili leave the North Caucasus alone ('Saakashvili playing with Circassian fire', *GeorgiaTimes.info*, 16-02-2011).

The Circassian question was raised further on the international agenda in 2010, when Circassian diaspora organizations lobbied Estonia for recognition of the Circassian genocide. In October 2010 the Estonian member of the European Parliament, Tunne Kelam, declared that he would raise the Circassian Question at the next hearing in the European Parliament on human rights in Russia. Mark Mickelson, Estonian Member of Parliament, further promised to keep the “Circassian problem” on the agenda in general and specifically in relation to the Council of Europe.<sup>77</sup>

The Russian parliament deputy, Sergei Markov, reacted by stating that the Circassian problem does not exist and represents “ideological sabotage” from the side of the Russophobe governments of Georgia, Estonia, and Poland, supported by certain strategic centres in Washington.<sup>78</sup> According to Markov, Russia is planning ‘a comprehensive programme to counter the plans for recognition of the genocide of the Circassians’.<sup>79</sup> Markov refuses to accept the existence of a Circassian genocide without further argumentation and characterizes it as “anti-Russian politics” in line with the so-called Ukrainian genocide—“Holodomor”. A different view came from academic circles in Moscow in the form of a conference called ‘the Circassian issue: historical memory, historiographic discourse, political strategies’ in March 2011, at which the hosts stressed that the conference was academic and non-political.<sup>80</sup>

On May 20, 2011 the Georgian Parliament formally recognized the Circassian genocide and condemned the crimes committed by the Russian Empire during the war from 1763 to 1864 by referring to a number of historical documents.<sup>81</sup> Circassian representatives took part in the discussions in the Georgian Parliament, which led to strong reactions from Sergei Markov who called the participating Circassians traitors of their people. Weeks later Markov was forced to apologize for his remarks, but by then the Head of the Adyge Hasa organization in the Republic of Adygea, Aramby Khapay, had already responded by comparing this reaction with the words of the Russian Emperor Alexander II, who during a visit in Maykop in 1861 allegedly stated: ‘We need

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<sup>77</sup> Fatima Tlisova, ‘Voice of America’, *Elot.ru* (14-10-2010), available at: [http://elot.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2075&Itemid=1](http://elot.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2075&Itemid=1).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Also President Arsen Kanokov of Kabardino-Balkaria has rejected the existence of Circassian Question (‘Interview with Arsen Kanokov’ (in Russian). *Elot.ru*, 28-01-2011). He referred to the issue as an “imaginary subject”, which led to a number of angry comments on the Internet.

<sup>80</sup> Polandov, Denis. ‘Virtual Circassia’. Prague Watchdog. [http://www.watchdog.cz/?top\\_from=36&lang=1](http://www.watchdog.cz/?top_from=36&lang=1). Retrieved: 06-01-2010.

<sup>81</sup> Some of these documents are found in the archives in Tbilisi. Tbilisi was the regional centre of the Russian Empire in most of the nineteenth century.

Circassia but we do not need Circassians themselves at all'.<sup>82</sup> The official Russian response was holding two official hearings on the Circassian issues in June, where the anti-Circassian rhetoric was significantly reduced.<sup>83</sup> These events led a representative of a Circassian non-governmental organization from Kabardino-Balkaria to conclude that the Circassian question had been elevated to a completely higher level.<sup>84</sup>

The Georgian recognition of the Circassian genocide was initially met with hesitation from many of the Circassian organizations, as many feared it was being used (or misused) by the Georgian government with the aim of hurting Russia in the aftermath of the 2008 war. Also, the strong Circassian solidarity with the Abkhazians-whom they regard as a brothers—in the many years of conflict with Georgia resulted in some reluctance. Still, after some days of consideration, eight Circassian organizations used the occasion of their meeting on another matter-promotion of repatriation from the diaspora to the homeland—to send a formal letter of thanks to the Georgian Parliament.<sup>85</sup> Most of the Circassian reactions in Russian-language Internet forums were positive towards the Georgian recognition. Already a year later—on May 21, 2012—a monument to the Circassian genocide was officially revealed in Anaklia by the Georgian Black Sea coast.<sup>86</sup>

## Civil society mobilization

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<sup>82</sup> 'Sergey Markov apologized to Circassians'. *Natpress.net* (26-06-2011).

<sup>83</sup> Only selected Circassian organizations were invited to these events: representatives of the ICA from Kaffed, Turkey and others widely regarded as pro-Russian and not promoting a "genocide understanding". Still, some of the participants managed to surprise the representatives of the Russian authorities by insisting on a proper treatment of the Circassian Question, including the so-called Circassian genocide. This is exemplified, for instance, by the statement and speech of the representative of the Circassian Association of California, Cicek Chek ('Address to the Russian Duma'. *Circassianworld.com*, (undated), available at: <http://www.circassianworld.com/new/component/content/article/1563.html>. Members of the ICA board have tried since then to distance themselves from the statements of Cicek Chek ('Open Letter to Asker Sokht', *Circassianculturalinstitute.org*, 31-10-2011).

<sup>84</sup> *North Caucasus Analysis* 12(12), *Jamestown.org* (06-06-2011).

<sup>85</sup> 'Who will be next?', *Natpress.net* (21-06-2011), available at: <http://www.natpress.net/index.php?newsid=6848>. The meeting was held in Maikop on May 29, 2011 by the Coordination Council of Circassian organizations. Repatriation has been a priority of Circassian organizations since the fall of the Soviet Union, but still less than 2,000 have actually returned. The required Russian language skills together with the level of bureaucracy and corruption in Russia are generally not considered attractive by Circassians in the diaspora. This has led to support for the proposals of creating a single Circassian republic in Russia or even an independent Circassian state (Conference in Anaklia, Georgia, 21-05-2012).

<sup>86</sup> 'In Georgia they began to commemorate the victims of the Caucasian War'. *Kavkaz-uzel.ru* (22-05-2012), available at: <http://www.Kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/206940>.

Following a decade during which most of the Circassian organizations were relatively passive and largely controlled by the authorities, the mid-2000s was marked by the appearance of new Circassian organizations and by new attempts at cooperation and coordination between the organizations.<sup>87</sup> This represents a new form of unity, in which *youth* and the *Internet* are key terms in the understanding of the recent developments within the civil society sector.<sup>88</sup> Still, it is important to stress that other-and sometimes related-issues such as increased urbanization, increased levels of education, and various global trends also play a role in this process.<sup>89</sup>

In general, Circassian movements and organizations have been oriented mainly towards the local authorities in their home republics. Since 2009 the level of cooperation among the Circassian organizations within the republics, as well as across the republican borders, has increased. In December 2010, eighteen Circassian organizations from the Russian Federation established a joint Circassian Council in order to present a united Circassian approach to their key issues, such as the Sochi Winter Olympics, recognition of the nineteenth century genocide, etc.<sup>90</sup> The idea is to be able to present a united platform for stronger lobbying efforts in relation to the federal authorities. This step was the culmination of a long process that gained momentum in late 2009, with joint protest gatherings by Circassians in Karachai-Circassia and Kabardino-Balkaria, which increasingly involved more and more Circassian organizations, including those from outside the entity where the protests were held.<sup>91</sup> Jointly, all of these initiatives represent a new level of unity and protest among the Circassian organizations.

The new Circassian Council represents a challenge towards the International Circassian Association (ICA), as seen when the initiators stated that the new council should be seen as a continuation of the

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<sup>87</sup> The organization “Circassian Congress” played a leading role as initiator of the request to the Russian Parliament for recognition of the so-called Circassian genocide in 2005.

<sup>88</sup> ‘Our unity is our force’ – stated by activists of the Circassian web portal *eLot.ru* (‘The united appeal of the activists of the independent Circassian web-portal eLot.Ru’, *Natpress.net*, Jan 27, 2011) as part of their appeal for unity in protest against violence between Circassians and the use of violence in general.

<sup>89</sup> The level of urbanization according to the 2010 census: Kardino-Balkaria: 55%; Adygea: 51%; Karachai-Cherkessia: 45%. Available at: [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm). Many villages have lost population to the larger cities. A number of young Circassian students have travelled to larger cities in Russia for education-it is unknown how many have returned afterwards.

<sup>90</sup> ‘The creation of the Council of Circassian organizations - the first step towards a unified organization in Russia’ (in Russian). *Elot.ru* (21-01-2011). Available at: [http://www.elot.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2213&Itemid=1](http://www.elot.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2213&Itemid=1)

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

congresses held in the early 1990s.<sup>92</sup> Criticism of the ICA has long been widespread among the Circassian diaspora organizations and has recently been mounting support among Circassian organizations in Russia. The ICA is regularly accused of suppressing Circassian issues instead of supporting them, and of acting as an instrument of control on behalf of the Kremlin authorities.<sup>93</sup> The ICA was established in 1991 as an international Circassian organization created to promote Circassian issues in general and especially cooperation between the diaspora and the homeland (Jaimoukha, 2001: 86). According to many Circassians, the Russian authorities during the 1990s managed to control the ICA and the organization was forced into a more defensive or passive role, which has led many to criticize the ICA for becoming a Soviet-type of organization just offering window dressing to the Circassian issues.<sup>94</sup> Protesting against the role of the ICA has become one of the key mobilizing points among many of the newer organizations. The youth protests against the ICA congress and elections in October 2009, where they were not allowed to speak or even enter the conference hall, marked a turning point in the re-activation of Circassian activism.<sup>95</sup> The 2010 establishment of the International Circassian Council (ICC), initiated by Circassian activists from the Circassian Cultural Institute in the USA with the purpose of performing international lobby-efforts on behalf of Circassian issues, especially promoting recognition of the Circassian genocide, represents another challenge to the ICA.<sup>96</sup> Dissatisfaction with the actions of the ICA had become so strong that it functioned as a point of mobilization among many Circassian individuals and organizations.<sup>97</sup>

The Coordinating Council of Circassian Organizations in Kabardino-Balkaria, which is an umbrella organization of all the Circassian organizations in the republic, is another example of the new type

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> For instance, 'To the President of the Russian "International Circassian Association" (ICA)'.

*Justicefornorthcaucasus.com* (11-05-2010) and 'Virtual Circassia', *Prague Watchdog* (06-01-2010).

<sup>94</sup> Amjad Jaimoukha refers to this as a neutralizing of the Circassian national movement. Also, the local media was "forced" to shy away from certain issues and some Circassian media outlets were closed. ('The story of a bronze idol'. *jaimoukha.synthasite.com*. Undated, available at: [jaimoukha.synthasite.com/resources/StatueOfMaria.pdf](http://jaimoukha.synthasite.com/resources/StatueOfMaria.pdf)).

<sup>95</sup> Haci Bayram Polat, Conference Presentation on the Role of the ICA, William Paterson University, New Jersey, USA (13-08-2008). Available on *Justicefornorthcaucasus.com*; see also 'ICA Presidential elections passed with rough infringements', *Natpress.net* (13-10-2009); see note 33 (11-05-2010).

<sup>96</sup> See note 33. In a surprising statement the Vice President of ICA, Mukhamed Khafitse (May 2011), in relation to a meeting of carefully selected and invited Circassian representatives with members of the Russian Parliament, asserted the following: 'We expect concrete decision from the Duma, and we think that the recognition of genocide in 1863 and 1864 would be a positive move' ('As Tbilisi Beckons, Circassians Find Ear in Moscow'. *Moscow Times* (17-05-2011)).

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, [http://www.justicefornorthcaucasus.com/jfnc\\_message\\_boards/Circassia\\_adiga.php?entry\\_id=1289349161](http://www.justicefornorthcaucasus.com/jfnc_message_boards/Circassia_adiga.php?entry_id=1289349161); [http://www.circassiapassport.com/2011/10/06/stop\\_the\\_ica\\_campaign](http://www.circassiapassport.com/2011/10/06/stop_the_ica_campaign); and [http://www.circassiannation.org/circassiannation\\_046.htm](http://www.circassiannation.org/circassiannation_046.htm).

of unity, cooperation, and strategic thinking. Most of the member organizations are, for instance, supporting the idea of creating a joint Circassian republic (by joining the existing Circassian territories of the three existing republics).<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, representatives of the Council have initiated the establishment of a so-called “Circassiada”-a pan-Circassian sports event planned to take place in the North Caucasus in 2012.<sup>99</sup> This was another attempt at creating an event that potentially could unite the Circassians, but the proposal was met with harsh comments and rejection from substantial parts of the diaspora-arguing that this was a pro-Russian proposal and that it was meant to legitimize the Sochi Olympics in 2014.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, the proposal was also met with harsh comments in Russia, claiming that the Circassiada was an attempt at smearing and discrediting the Russian arrangement of the Sochi Winter Olympics.<sup>101</sup> In the end, the project had to be shelved.<sup>102</sup> This illustrates some of the dilemmas and the difficulties the local Circassian organizations and initiatives often face.

The new Circassian initiatives are often met with rejection from the side of the local and federal authorities by referring to their opponents as “nationalists”, “foreign agents”, “agents of the opposition”, etc., often making use of a terminology known from the Cold War period (Pirani, 2010: 123).<sup>103</sup> Leading organization members and activists have been monitored by representatives from the intelligence services, and several Circassian activists and journalists have been forced to leave the North Caucasus following harassment, threats, beatings, etc. Two Circassian (youth) activists were violently attacked in two of the republics in 2010-one was killed and one was seriously injured. Furthermore, two important Circassian public figures were killed in Kabardino-Balkaria late 2010, which shocked many in the Circassian organizations and civil society at large.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> ‘Circassia’. *UNPO* (25-03-2008), available at: <http://www.unpo.org/article/7869>; ‘Window on Eurasia’, *Jamestown.org* (25-01-2010).

<sup>99</sup> See [www.circassiada.org](http://www.circassiada.org). A support site has been established in the USA, see [www.circassiada.com](http://www.circassiada.com).

<sup>100</sup> ‘Interviews with diaspora representatives’, *Justicefornorthcaucasus.com* (01-11-2009).

<sup>101</sup> ‘Farce “Circassiad” reveals itself’ (in Russian), *Justicefornorthcaucasus.com*, (06-02-2010).

<sup>102</sup> According to the initiators, this is not just because of the resistance from different sides, but also due to legal challenges.

<sup>103</sup> *Elot.ru* (28-01-2011). Another stereotypical way of reacting to the Circassian mobilization was reflected in a conference on the Circassian Question (Moscow, March 2011) by Denis Sololov (Center for Social and Economic Research). Sololov stated: ‘Any social movement in the Caucasus, one way or another serve the interests of the local elites, focused primarily on the struggle for access to the federal budget resources’. (‘The Circassian issue was discussed in Moscow’ (in Russian), *REGNUM via elot.ru*, 25-03-2011).

<sup>104</sup> One was a well-known ethnographer specializing in Circassian history and folklore and the other was the *mufti* of Kabardino-Balkaria. Insurgents have taken responsibility for both killings, though their motives are challenged by different observers. Russian intelligence services have been accused of being involved (*North Caucasus Analysis* 12(1), *Jamestown.org*, 03-01-2011).



As a result of these events, several Circassian civil society representatives decided to be less publically visible and some chose to leave the republic or the country.<sup>105</sup>

The mobilization unfolding through the actions of the Circassian organizations, activists, and Internet media operates mainly within the public sphere of civil society, which is an area of key interest in the democratization process unfolding in the Russian Federation since 1991.<sup>106</sup> The understanding of civil society as a field of conflict and resistance is highly relevant in the Russian context (as well as the Turkish context).<sup>107</sup> Civil society has become one of the key terms when discussing the democratization process in post-communist Eastern Europe and lately also in Turkey, where a democratization process is changing a former authoritarian state into a semi-authoritarian state under continued transformation. As a part of this process, a number of new Circassian organizations and websites have sprung up since the mid-2000s in Turkey. Compared to this, the Circassian organizations in Russia are still lagging behind, while the Circassian Internet activities in Russia appear to have reached the level found in Turkey. As part of the ongoing revival, the Circassian civil society sector in Turkey has undergone politicization and an accompanying polarization between the politically- and culturally-oriented organizations (Hansen 2013). However, in the total picture of the significantly increased Circassian/Caucasian civil society sector in Turkey, this also represents a new division of labour, where the newer organizations tend to specialize in more politically- or lobbying-oriented activities, while most of the older organizations tend to prioritize more culturally-oriented activities.

“Space for action” is a term often used in relation to discussions on civil society, though it is not necessarily defined. According to Alison Van Rooy (1998), space for action constitutes one of the six viewpoints that categorize the concept of civil society.<sup>108</sup> This has led Hakkarainen et al. to the

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<sup>105</sup> Information obtained from several sources - mostly informally - for instance at conferences in Brussels (June, 2012), Anaklia, Georgia (May 2012), Istanbul (May 2012), New York (April 2011) and during visits to Maikop (October 2011).

<sup>106</sup> Much criticism on the use of the term civil society can be found, including for instance the tendency to idealize civil society as actors of democratic change (see for example Grugel and Uhlin, 2009). Lately the term has also been applied to discussions on cultural diversity and social cohesion (Murray 2002, 2).

<sup>107</sup> According to Vaclav Havel (1993) ‘a strong civil society is a crucial condition of a strong democracy. Empowering civil society is a central concern for the project of democracy’ (Flyvbjerg 1998, 210). According to the definition of David Lewis – inspired by Antonio Gramsci – ‘civil society is the arena, separate from state and market, in which ideological hegemony is contested, implying that civil society contained a wide range of organisations which both challenged and upheld the existing order’ (Lewis 2001, 2).

<sup>108</sup> The other five are value, collective noun, historical moment, anti-hegemony, and antidote to state (Hakkarainen, et al. 2002, 2).



following formulation: “Civil society has also been used as a metaphor for the space organisations occupy, usually described as the enabling environment in which they prosper (or fade) rather than the more battle-ridden terrain of Gramsci’s writings. Civil society is, together with the state and market one of the three ‘spheres’ that interface in making of democratic societies” (Hakkarainen et al., 2002, 3).

According to the annual ratings from Freedom House on the development of democracy, Russia has experienced a drop from 4.88 in 2001 to 6.14 in 2010-with 7 as the lowest rating.<sup>109</sup> The ratings consists of eight different indicators and the rating for civil society has, in the same period, dropped even more from 4.00 to 6.75, while the ratings for independent media has stagnated at 6.25 for the last four years. The low ratings on civil society are mostly due to a number of incidents of violence against activists (often unsolved and unpunished) and persecution from the police and other authorities due to a strict law from 2006 governing their activities.<sup>110</sup> On the positive side, it notes that bloggers have found new ways of mobilizing groups and that a drop in racially-motivated crimes has appeared in 2010 (Orttung 2010, 437).<sup>111</sup>

The fact that the ratings on freedom of media has stagnated could hint at the new opportunities for civil society action on the Internet, but otherwise the apparent new space for action reflected by the present mobilization among the Circassian organizations appears to be paradoxical. The drastic fall in democracy ratings in Russia has been part of the process of the so-called “managed democracy” model of the period of Putinism during the last decade.<sup>112</sup> This has also been labelled as “managed pluralism” by others (Richter 2008, 195). The increased potential of the Internet, the new approach of the youth, and international inspiration from the diaspora and from international civil society trends all appear to be key elements of the new space for action.<sup>113</sup> The Circassian organizations and activists are inspired by prevailing international notions on civil society activism, rights-based

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<sup>109</sup> On the Corruption Perception Index 2011 from Transparency International, Russia is placed as no. 143 of 183 countries and Turkey as no. 61 (Available at: <http://www.transparency.org/country>).

<sup>110</sup> ‘Russia’, *Freedom House*. (Report 2011), available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2011/russia>.

<sup>111</sup> The Russian ratings on democracy are similar to many of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, which has resulted in speculations that Russia could be affected by demonstrations similar to the 2011 Arab Spring in the near future.

<sup>112</sup> Centralized government and an authoritarian so-called managed democracy are key features of “Putinism”.

<sup>113</sup> According to the 2012 Freedom House ‘Freedom on the Internet’ report, for Russia ‘Internet Freedom Status’ is labelled as ‘Partly Free’ while ‘Press Freedom Status’ is generally noted as ‘Not Free’. Available at: [freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2012/Russia](http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2012/Russia). Retrieved: 01-12-2012.

lobbyism, freedom of speech, cultural and religious diversity.<sup>114</sup> Also the rights-based approach of organizations, such as the all-Russian Memorial that has existed for more than two decades, constitute inspiration for civil society pioneers in Russia-and potential partners.<sup>115</sup> It seems as if the recent Circassian actions increasingly attempt to challenge the managed democracy and centralization of the Russian Federation of the last decade.

The Circassian civil society sector has managed to enlarge their space for action in the battlefield of political life in the Russian Federation. This is a parallel to the politicization experienced by Circassian organizations in Turkey and elsewhere, which could indicate a new development in the Russian democratization process. The geographic location clearly indicates why the Circassian question in Russia is often framed as a geopolitical issue or as a security issue, rather than an issue of minority rights, which is a situation the Circassians share with many ethnic minorities around the globe.

### ***Youth mobilization***

Circassian youth have in many ways been spearheading a movement to openly challenge the authorities, as well as some of the older Circassian organizations in recent years.<sup>116</sup> Youth play a key role in the ongoing revival of new Circassian initiatives. Youth groups and activists have managed to put pressure on Circassian organizations and get agendas approved that had originally been rejected, and youth groups have successfully mobilized young people and staged their own protest gatherings and events, as seen on several occasions in Karachai-Cherkessia in November 2008 and again in October 2009.<sup>117</sup> The actions of youth and youth groups challenged the

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<sup>114</sup> Civil society activism of today is also based on earlier movements, such as the civil rights movements of the 1960s, the decolonisation movements, the movements for rights of indigenous peoples, etc.

<sup>115</sup> Memorial is perhaps the internationally most well-known Russian human rights organization. Memorial was started in the late 1980s, before the fall of the Soviet Union, when members began to document and inform about human rights violations during the Soviet period. Memorial played a leading role in defining how civil society organizations could operate under the new circumstances of the *Perestroika* period (more information available at [memo.ru](http://memo.ru)).

<sup>116</sup> The category “youth” is rarely defined but generally refer to persons between 16 and 29, most of whom are students and live mostly in larger towns.

<sup>117</sup> Fatima Tlisova, ‘Circassian Congress calls for unification of Circassian republics in North Caucasus’, *North Caucasus Analysis* 9, 45. [jamestown.org](http://jamestown.org) (26-11-2008); ‘In Georgia, the conference on "Circassian issue" demanded boycott the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi’ (in Russian), [kavkaz-uzel.ru](http://kavkaz-uzel.ru), November 23, 2010; ‘Window on Eurasia’, *CircassianWorld.com* (05-10-2009).

Circassian/Caucasian traditions for respect of the elders, which earlier had, from time to time, resulted in a marginalization of the young in organizational activities.<sup>118</sup> Still, many have afterwards accepted and respected the initiative shown by youth and their activist approach. Youth groups have become active and visible, and have managed to bring new ideas and inspiration from the outside, such as through discussions and observations from the Internet. In the last couple of years, Circassian youth in Russia have increasingly been involved in discussions of Circassian history, tradition, and identity in general.<sup>119</sup> The renewed campaign for recognition of the Circassian genocide is but one example.<sup>120</sup> This has played an important role in the newfound mobilization and can be expected to continue to do so in the nearest future.

A significant portion of the young people are internationally oriented in their rights-based approach to civil society action and they have from the outset embraced modern technological tools, such as the Internet and mobile telecommunication, where they often are ahead of the older organizations in their working modalities. The cultural globalization appears to have an empowering effect on the Circassian youth that actively look for opportunities to counter some of the negative aspects of globalization, such as the threats of losing the Circassian language (Kirmse 2010, 5). Critics of globalization have often suggested that young persons are in a process of alienation from traditional culture due to globalization, but as the Circassian examples show this is not necessarily the case (Kirmse 2010, 5).

Youth is not just taking part, but often initiating processes of reproduction of Circassian ethnic identity. The Caucasus is a region often presented by various local, as well as international, observers in culturalistic terms as being “clannish” or “feudal”, but the Circassian youth (and others) are countering these perceptions and updating the classical Caucasian understanding of youth with a modern, global, and democratically-oriented dimension.<sup>121</sup> The importance and the responsibility of the present generation of Circassian youth to take action were affirmed in a

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<sup>118</sup> A statement from some of the organizers of the ICA-conference in Maikop: ‘young people have no reason to be here and their opinions are irrelevant’. (‘Window on Eurasia’, *CircassianWorld.com*, October 5, 2009).

<sup>119</sup> As note 30 (21-01-2011). Also confirmed in individual conversations in the North Caucasus in 2009 and 2011, as well as during conferences in 2012.

<sup>120</sup> ‘Employees of Kabardino-Balkaria deny the charges of illegal detention by lawyer Dorogova’, *kavkaz-uzel.ru* (18-11-2010).

<sup>121</sup> A similar tendency can be observed in relation to gender issues.

statement from three organizations in March 2011, as part of their protests against killings and terror attacks in the region.<sup>122</sup>

Youth representatives are insisting on their right to argue and lobby for the collective rights of the Circassians as an indigenous ethno-cultural group.<sup>123</sup> This includes what could be called a campaign for a post-colonial assessment of the two to three hundred years of history within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.<sup>124</sup> This type of discussions are taking place in contemporary Russia, though on a relatively marginalized level compared to many of the neighbouring post-Soviet states, where such discussions are much more central. As these discussions often point at imperial Russia as a colonizing empire, they are often met by rejection or anger by official Russian representatives.<sup>125</sup> Still, new developments could push such discussions into a more central role in Russia, which is one of the key aims of the Circassian organizations. So-called hidden histories or suppressed memories possess a strong potential for mobilization-as can be witnessed by many of the Circassians in the diaspora and on the Internet (Cohen 1997, 235).

In the post-communist democratization programmes of many of the other post-Soviet countries, western donors have often supported and encouraged the development of youth activism and organizations. In the Russian Federation such programmes are largely met with suspicion from the authorities, and are often labelled as foreign support for the opposition (Richter, 2008: 196). The fear of youth (and others) as civil society agents of change has led to new youth policies and the creation of new so-called patriotic youth movements and policies in Russia to counter these tendencies, for instance the “*Nashi*” movement and the “Young Guards” of the United Russia party (the party of power that also plays a role in relation to *Nashi*).<sup>126</sup> *Nashi* and other so-called patriotic youth organizations were established to prevent youth involvement in the type of new agendas and changes brought by the Rose-revolution in Georgia and the Orange-revolution in Ukraine and have received considerable funding for their activities (Blum 2007, 135). Members of *Nashi* were spotted

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<sup>122</sup> What is Circassian nationalism?, *Natpress.net* (17-03-2011).

<sup>123</sup> *North Caucasus Analysis* 10(15), *Jamestown.org* (17-04-2009).

<sup>124</sup> ‘Russia is formally a federation, but it has kept a number of imperial features and is still a multiethnic empire with potential territorial instability looming round the next corner’ (Hedetoft and Blum 2008, 21).

<sup>125</sup> ‘Dumanov: There is not Circassian problem in Russia’. Statement by Hasan Dumanov, historian and acting head of Division of Social and Political Studies at the Kabardino-Balkarians Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences. *Kavkaz-uzel.ru* (18-11-2010). Maksim Shevchenko (Head of Center for Strategic Research on Religion and Policy): ‘Simply absurd’ and ‘political pressure against Moscow’ (*MoscowTimes* (03-03-2001), on line edition).

<sup>126</sup> Young Guards have been active in the Circassian republics for a longer period, while *Nashi* only in 2011 has taken steps to open branches in the North Caucasus.

at the football-related riots in Moscow in December 2010, where Caucasians were violently attacked and the slogan “Russia for the Russian” repeatedly voiced.<sup>127</sup> In relation to the North Caucasus, an organization such as *Nashi* with its loud othering of the non-Russians of the neighbouring countries often manages to strengthen the production of Caucasian identity as a counter-reaction. This appears to be counter-productive in relation to the aims of the organization, which are to support Russian sovereignty and prevent foreign influence in Russia.<sup>128</sup> This is a reference to the youth-dominated movements (*Otpor*) that played a key role in ousting Milosevic in Serbia in 2000, the launching of the “colour revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine in the mid-2000s, and the so-called Arab Spring of 2011. The contemporary trend of Circassian youth activism is an attempt to manifest their role in the post-Soviet democratization process-as the first post-Soviet generation.

Olivier Roy has emphasized how the Arab Spring of 2011 is (also) a generational phenomenon, where a new generation is protesting against the stagnating societies and expressing their wish to be part of the global economy and global exchange at large – much in line with the May 1968 events in Paris.<sup>129</sup> The youth initiatives among the Circassians, with their demands for increased rights for minorities, have some parallels to the Arab Spring, though the national level of the mobilizations in these countries cannot be compared to the Circassian efforts. In Russia, the incidents of the 2011 Arab Spring have led to speculations on a potential tightening of the use of the Internet and a new law to facilitate such action has been approved.<sup>130</sup> However, that could risk generating further dissatisfaction among ethnic Russian youth beyond the control of the authorities and the above mentioned pro-Kremlin youth organizations.

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<sup>127</sup> ‘Russia: Kremlin Struggling to Keep Lid on Pandora's Box of Nationalism’, *eurasianet.org* (December 20, 2012).

<sup>128</sup> Nashi has often been referred to as a Komsomol-like organization (Lucas, 2008:79) or called Putin-Jugend (‘A beating on my beat’, *New York Times*, December 11, 2010.). The Sova-Centre has stated the following on the aim of Nashi: ‘to distract Russian society from a mood of social protest and to discredit the political opposition in the lead-up to elections’ (‘The Phantom of Manezhnaya Square: Radical Nationalism and Efforts to Counteract It in 2010’, *sova-center.ru*, 05-05-2011). For further information on the role of Nashi in relation to xenophobia and nationalism in Russia, see Mark Ames and Alexander Zaitchik, ‘Skinhead violence raising in Russia’, *Thenation.com* (10-09-2007).

<sup>129</sup> ‘Olivier Roy on Middle East social movements’, *Sargasso.nl* (23-02-2011).

<sup>130</sup> The Arab Spring that began in 2011 led to speculations of a Russian Spring or a Russian Facebook Revolution, especially in relation to the many protests raised against election fraud in the parliamentary elections of December 2011.

Another youth-related issue is about young people leaving for the forests and mountains of the North Caucasus to join the insurgents.<sup>131</sup> This issue links to contemporary discussions on security and terrorism that have gained significant media coverage in Russia, as well as in the rest of the world through the last decade, and are also widely circulated through the Internet. Of the three Circassian republics, the insurgents are mainly found in Kabardino-Balkaria, though in recent years the number of insurgents in Karachai-Cherkessia has also been increasing.<sup>132</sup> The Islamist “movement” appear to be spreading slowly from east to west, which increasingly results in reports on people’s fear of potential terrorist acts directed towards Sochi due to the 2014 Olympics.<sup>133</sup> It is widely believed that youth are motivated to join the insurgents by unemployment, lack of other options, and, to a lesser degree, religious reasons. The well-known Circassian activist Ibrahim Yaganov stated, after the rejection of topics for the agenda of an ICA-meeting that had been proposed by youth representatives, that youth in Circassian republics are caught in a vacuum for which the dominant Circassian organizations and the ICA are also responsible.<sup>134</sup> This could lead to increased support for Islamic extremism.<sup>135</sup>

A different example of the new role of youth is the suggestion by a young parliament member from the Republic of Adygea who, at the all-Russian forum of young parliamentarians, managed to achieve support for an appeal to the Russian government and the Russian Olympic Committee for the inclusion of Circassian symbols in the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics programme. The appeal referred to the philosophy and traditions of the Olympics movement for promoting multi-cultural coexistence and tolerance and how the inclusion of one specific popular tale—the so-called *Nart epos*—which connects the themes of multi-cultural coexistence and tolerance to the Caucasian

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<sup>131</sup> It should be noted that parts of what is referred to as “insurgents” consists of criminal gangs earning an income through means such as extortion and kidnapping. The high rates of youth unemployment are regarded as a key reason for successful attraction of people to both of these types of “insurgency”.

<sup>132</sup> *North Caucasus Analyst* 13(13), *Jamestown.org* (21-06-2012).

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Another issue frequently referred to is that law enforcement responses to conflicts often can be labelled as “crude” and characterized by impunity. As noted in a 2012 report from Amnesty International this has ‘led to a situation in which civilians in the region [the North Caucasus] fear the law enforcement agencies and the armed insurgents equally’ (*North Caucasus Analysis* 13(13), *Jamestown.org*, 25-06-2012).

<sup>135</sup> ‘Window of Eurasia’, *Circassianworld.com* (05-10-2009), available at: <http://www.circassianworld.com/new/analysis/1388-moscow-gives-circassian-young-people.html>. Circassians generally practice moderate Islam and the attraction of radical Muslim groups is believed to be higher among the Balkars and Karachais in the two above mentioned republics than among their Circassian counterparts (Bram 2008, 44–45).

setting.<sup>136</sup> This is another example of how new voices in Russia can be supportive towards Circassian issues (or at least elements thereof).<sup>137</sup>

The type of civil society agency discussed in this paper is often dependent on the initiative and examples of key individuals. Douglas W. Blum suggests applying the term “cultural entrepreneurs” to such figures, according to a definition from Crawford Young: “a cultural entrepreneur will be understood here as someone who strategically fashions and activates identity; i.e., who “devotes himself to enlarging the symbolic, solidary resources of the community” by mobilizing dormant or unselfconscious cultural beliefs and practices into overt, ideologized symbols of belonging, thus creating a “catechism of identity”” (Blum 2007, 140). In his study of youth activism in Russia and other post-Soviet states, Blum has identified a new type of Russian youth activism that has blossomed in recent years, though mainly within the sphere of Russian nation-building and largely as the result of a state-managed and state-initiated policy (Blum 2007, 138). Blum distinguishes between three types of cultural entrepreneurs: state, sub-state, and non-state. In relation to the Circassian mobilization addressed in this paper, the Circassian entrepreneurs are almost entirely non-state actors, especially related to the role of youth. Circassian cultural entrepreneurs of the three Caucasian republics have tended to constitute cooperation between sub-state and non-state actors with the former in the dominating role, which has often resulted in relatively restrained or representational functions in relation to certain public events. This is the level of activity that Circassian organizations were forced into in the second half of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s, which Ruslan Keshev from the Circassian Congress has labelled as “dormant”. And this is what many of the newer and often youth-dominated organizations and initiatives protest against.

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<sup>136</sup> ‘Young Russian parliamentarians supported the use of Circassian symbolism in the Sochi Winter Olympics’. *Elot.ru* (28-10-2009).

<sup>137</sup> Another example is the formal acknowledgement of the Circassians as “one people” by the Russian Academy of Science as stated in a letter of May 25, 2010 in a formal answer to the ICA (‘The conclusion of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology: this is a single Circassian people’ (in Russian), *Elot.ru* (15-06-2010); available at: [http://www.elot.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1819&Itemid=1](http://www.elot.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1819&Itemid=1).) This was confirmed by the ICA (19-02-2011, ‘About the self-name and a single exonym of the Circassian people’, *International Circassian Association* (19-02-2011; available at: [http://www.mcha.kbsu.ru/English/m\\_ispolkom29E.htm](http://www.mcha.kbsu.ru/English/m_ispolkom29E.htm)). The two conferences on different aspects of the Circassian Question were held in Moscow in March 2011 are another example (‘“The Circassian Question” is not threatened by the Sochi Olympics according to expert’ (in Russian), *Elot.ru* (18-03-2011), available at: [http://www.elot.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2300&Itemid=1](http://www.elot.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2300&Itemid=1); ‘Neflyasheva: Russia should oppose inter-ethnic strife’ (in Russian), *Kavkaz-uzel.ru* (25-03-2011, available at: [kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/182789](http://kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/182789)).

Contemporary Circassian youth activism shares some of the tendencies of the Russian youth movements described by Blum and are similar or parallel in terms of the use of indigenous and ethnic identity in their mobilization.<sup>138</sup> The major difference is role of state and government policies. Recent Circassian youth activism is partly a re-action to official Russian youth policies that, on the one hand, praise tolerance and coexistence as part of an all-Russian federal civic nationalism and, on the other hand, constantly emphasize the role of ethnic “Russianness” and the Orthodox religion in the history of the Russian state (Vodichev and Lamin, 2008: 120). In this way, Circassian youth activism also represents a protest against marginalization as a minority ethnic group that is less privileged than the majority ethnic group. On a general level, Circassian activism benefits from the institutionalization of the Circassian ethno-national identity as it has taken place through many years as a titular-nationality in the republics, which include rights to local language teaching and publishing, local research institutions, local media, etc. Still, much of the contemporary protests by Circassian civil society actors are targeting different forms of discrimination and erosion of cultural rights in terms of language teaching, publications, conditions for repatriation from the diaspora, etc.<sup>139</sup>

## **Internet mobilization**

The scale of Internet coverage in Russia was limited for a long period of time, and access was controlled and monitored by the authorities. However, since the mid-2000s, increased Internet access and the arrival of the new social media of Web 2.0 have resulted in significant Circassian Internet activity and many Circassian Internet sites can now be found. In relation to contacts with the Circassian diaspora, language has been a barrier as Russian is the preferred language in Russia, while Turkish is the preferred language in Turkey (or Europe), where the majority of the diaspora is located. Moreover, the Circassian language is sometimes used in Russia with the Cyrillic alphabet, which only a small number among the diaspora can use. English is thus increasingly becoming the

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<sup>138</sup> Cultivation of patriotism has according to Blum become ‘a cornerstone of youth policy, and of Russian national identity as a whole’ (Blum 2007, 121). As such, it is hardly surprising that similar tendencies can be found among different ethnic groups in the Caucasus.

<sup>139</sup> The contemporary youth activism differs from the former generation of Circassian civil society action from the late 1980s and early 1990s, where the key actors tended to be cultural and academic elites. These still play a role today, but in a more subdued way, though many, for instance, contribute to the generation of knowledge on Circassian issues by writing articles, analyses and blogs for the Circassian websites, as well as publishing books and participating in other forms of electronic media production.



language of transnational contacts between Circassians in the diaspora and in the Caucasus. The digital divide appears to be in a process of being bridged, and youth activists play a key role in this process. In Turkey, there have also been delays in bridging the digital divide, though during the last decade ethnic minorities have increasingly been allowed to organize and present their issues in public due to the Turkish democratization process, partly motivated by the rapprochement to the EU. Protests against the Sochi Olympics in 2014, linked to the key Circassian narrative on the forced exile in both time and space, play a facilitating role in this renewed Circassian mobilization.<sup>140</sup> The ongoing Internet revival among the Circassians, which for a period appeared to take place in two separate zones defined by the Russian and Turkish languages respectively, now increasingly includes links and the transfer of information.<sup>141</sup> Many Circassians in the North Caucasus are becoming aware of the mobilization and discussions among the diaspora and the fact that a kind of virtual Circassia or transnational Circassian public sphere has developed from below by a multitude of actors. The Internet has built-in potential for multiplication through hyperlinking and cross-mediation, which increases the potential visibility and thereby also the potential for mobilization.<sup>142</sup> The dialogue and feedback functions of the social media sites of Web 2.0 also increase involvement and potential mobilization.

For a number of years there has been a significantly wider space for action online than off-line within the civil society sector and the media in Russia.<sup>143</sup> Within the online sphere there is an awareness of international standards and discussions on issues such as human rights, minority rights, and freedom speech from the beginning, which was enhanced through transnational links and contacts. It is this functioning of the Internet as a kind of free-zone in Russian society that has also increasingly affected Circassian visibility and mobilization-especially online. There is no doubt that these activities are also monitored closely by the intelligence services in Russia, and several

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<sup>140</sup> For instance, 'NoSochi2014.org' (in English/ Turkish/Russian/Arabic/Hebrew) is an international Circassian site (its predecessor olympicgonocide.info can still be accessed), 'antisochi.org' is Caucasian/Circassian (in Russian) and 'BoycottSochi.eu' (in English) is international and operates under the slogan "No Democracy-No Olympic Games".

<sup>141</sup> Also English and Arabic language spheres have been important. The English language sphere has especially contributed to increase the transnational awareness among Circassian activists and has increased the international attention of Circassian issues towards a non-Circassian audience.

<sup>142</sup> Lars Funch Hansen, '*iCircassia*'. Paper presented at ASN Convention, Columbia University, New York, April 2009.

<sup>143</sup> Reporters without Borders, 'Russia' (updated July 2011): 'Censorship of the Internet, like censorship of the media, is nowadays largely decentralised. But although strong leadership from the top in all areas of society is not a guiding principle for the authorities, admonishments about cyber-censorship have been strangely slow in coming'. Available at: <http://www.en.rsf.org/surveillance-russia,39766.html>. Still, in this report it is also stated that though the Internet is 'a space where independent voices still find expression', the authorities are increasingly developing technological solutions in order to increase options for online filtering and surveillance.

activists have been contacted and asked why they carry out anti-Russian activities, if they care about the safety of their families, etc.<sup>144</sup> The *Nart* television station, which was initiated by representatives from the diaspora in Jordan, has managed to establish an office in the Caucasus and has become another example of media that can unify the Circassians.<sup>145</sup> Their transmissions mainly focus on culture, traditions, and history, and can use the Circassian language without having to choose an alphabet, which is a challenge to many Internet actors.

Internet coverage has risen significantly in Russia and in 2012 almost half of the population has access to the Internet.<sup>146</sup> This number is generally lower in the North Caucasus, but key actors, such as civil society activists and a substantial proportion of young persons have extensive access. Aihwa Ong has stated that the Internet is an information technology that transnational groups wish to use 'to exercise a new form of power', thereby hinting at the potential role of the Internet in lobby and policy oriented efforts (Ong 2003).

In the Freedom House report for 2010 on democratic development in Russia, the index ranking for independent media is still very low; small and marginalized websites that are often referred to as belonging to the opposition are allowed to remain, while the more popular media outlets and websites are often censored or bought by the authorities or companies with close links to the authorities (Orttung 2010, 437). So far most of the Circassian websites appear to fall in the marginal category and are allowed to continue. New laws in 2012 have increased the options available for authorities to close websites, which has led to a fear of censorship and crackdown on independent Internet media and non-governmental organizations by some observers.<sup>147</sup>

The anthropologist Maximilian Forte has developed an analytic model for electronic revival among marginalized minorities or indigenous groups, according to which such groups can achieve

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<sup>144</sup> *North Caucasus Analysis* 10(15), *Jamestown.org* (17-04-2009).

<sup>145</sup> See [www.narttv.com](http://www.narttv.com); [www.facebook.com/pages/NART-National-Adiga-Radio-Television](https://www.facebook.com/pages/NART-National-Adiga-Radio-Television).

<sup>146</sup> 'Russia is now an Internet society', *Da Russophile* (03-09-2012, available at [darussophile.com/2012/09/03/russia-is-now-an-Internet-society/](http://darussophile.com/2012/09/03/russia-is-now-an-Internet-society/)).

<sup>147</sup> The Russian ability to wage so-called cyberwar was illustrated in actions against Estonia in 2007 and Georgia in 2008—a type of action that in the future could also include attacks on, for instance, social media networks (Thomas Rid, 'Think again: Cyberwar', *Foreign Policy* (27-02-2012), online edition, available at: <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/27cyberwar?page=full>; 'Russia's Internet 'blacklist' law sparks free-speech fears'. Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty (01-11-2012), available at: <http://www.rferl.org/content/Russia-Internet-blacklist-free-speech/24758022.html>; 'Internet restriction law comes online', *Moscow Times* (01-11-2012), online edition, available at: <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/Internet-restriction-law-comes-on-line/470892.html>).

visibility, embodiment, recognition, and authenticity through the use of the Internet in a manner similar to Hobsbawm's notions on "invention of tradition" or Anderson's "imagined communities" (Forte 2006, 145).<sup>148</sup> This type of revival contributes to the creation of a collective consciousness of belonging to a joint Circassian community beyond the republican borders of everyday life-and increasingly also across international borders. The daily use of and participation in various Circassian forum discussions and social websites constantly enhances this process in a manner described by Forte as a continually ongoing loop-function. This results in a much wider circulation, outreach, and potential impact than was the case with the so-called electronic capitalism of the 1990s that mainly built on television and radio.<sup>149</sup> Many of books and articles on Circassian history, traditions, and identity published in the 1990s are now remediated and circulated on the Internet. It is clear that much larger target groups can be reached and, through the use of modern media with youth appeal, additional target groups become involved, which includes youth as active participants in discussion forums and in various ways of commenting on texts, photos, films, etc. Informing Circassians about their culture, history, and traditions has often been the first priority of Circassian organizations and Internet initiatives, as many Circassians had a limited knowledge about this. This approach to enlightenment has also shown a potential for mobilization. Increased use of the Internet has contributed to enlarging the Circassian public sphere in Russia and has offered a space for Circassian actors that are not available off-line.

Thus, a new type of Internet-based organization has emerged with the spread of the Internet and can function on a low budget, which makes it well-suited for grass-root oriented activism. This also contributes to explaining how virtual community building on a transnational level can—to a certain extent—bypass the authorities or other powerful actors. As stressed by many observers, the virtual world is part of the real world.

### **Factors enhancing ethnic mobilization**

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<sup>148</sup> These tendencies are part of what have been labelled "digital diaspora" where homeland relations can be virtually redefined and create or recreate links that had disappeared (Brinkerhoff 2009).

<sup>149</sup> Electronic capitalism is a term pointed at by Arjun Appadurai (1996, 161) based on the term print capitalism developed by Benedict Anderson (1991) to describe how (new) media had an impact on the production of nationalism and national identity in his famous book *Imagined Communities*. The period after 1990 in the North Caucasus was marked by a revival of both print and electronic capitalism.

As already mentioned, the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi constitutes a key issue in the ongoing transnational Circassian mobilization, but a number of what could be called structural issues also contribute as mobilizing factors. These include anti-Caucasian xenophobia in Russia, the role of ethnic Russians as the dominant ethnic group in the Russian Federation (in an asymmetrical relationship), the double-titular composition of some of the republics in the North Caucasus, and the general process of ethnic homogenization.

Anti-Caucasian xenophobia and discrimination is widespread in Russia. Between fifty and hundred persons are killed annually by racists in Russia and hundreds are severely injured in violent hate crimes (Orttung 2010, 443). A significant portion of the victims are Caucasians. These problems have become so widespread during the last ten years that the Circassian and Caucasian organizations in Moscow now spend more energy supporting Caucasians with legal assistance and other forms of support than originally planned. The high number of Circassians and other Caucasians living in Moscow as students, businessmen, or various types of labourers has contributed to make Caucasians more visible targets of racist groups.<sup>150</sup>

The type of relationship that exists between the big Russian state that shares its name with a dominant ethnic group, the Russians or so-called “Staatsvolk” (Brubaker 1996, 172), and the Circassians, as ethnic minorities located in the southern periphery, can only be labelled an asymmetric power-relationship. This relationship is further challenged by the fact that for an extended period both groups have been troubled by questions of identity and identification as part of the transitional uncertainties that also occurred in many other areas of the post-Soviet space.<sup>151</sup> In spite of being the “weaker” part in the power-relation—or sometimes also because of it—this situation can generate new support and mobilization behind issues of ethnic character or relevance for peoples such as the Circassians.<sup>152</sup> This is a type of structural problem in the so-called asymmetrical

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<sup>150</sup> The violent riots in the centre of Moscow in December 2010 illustrated how anti-Caucasian sentiments and violence erupted after a young ethnic Russian football fan was killed by a young Circassian. Several Caucasians were randomly beaten and the slogan “Russia for Russians” was used repeatedly. Circassians in the North Caucasus, including from the authorities, and the diaspora protested, while much of the coverage of the Russian mainstream media focussed on the young ethnic Russian as a victim of violence (‘Moscow’s race riots: Are Caucasians white?’, *The Examiner*, 06-01-2011).

<sup>151</sup> Also Khazanov (2006, 45) has written on contemporary Russia as a nationalizing state in quest of identity (identity politics).

<sup>152</sup> The widespread anti-Caucasian xenophobia and the tendency of the Russian media to constantly link the North Caucasus to issues such as Islamists, terror, and violence to many Circassians end up stressing the point made by Andreas Wimmer on ethno-national dominance as performed by various elite actors in Russia, and how this can function as a mobilizing factor among ethno-cultural minorities.

ethno-federalism of Russia that dates back to the state-formation process that began in 1991 - a federal model with a solid built-in conflict potential (Sakwa 2006, 618).

Andreas Wimmer distinguishes between inclusivist and exclusivist types of dominant ethnicity, by which he states that the more exclusivist variant delineates a field of political tension and can represent a more contested and conflictive mode of ethno-national dominance (Wimmer 2004, 47). Wimmer uses the term ethno-national dominance to cover both dominant ethnicity and dominant nationhood, which can be useful in relation to the Russian context where the two forms often are mixed and often not defined. Within contemporary Russia there seems to be a tendency to switch between being inclusivist and exclusivist in a manner that has similarities with the earlier periods of the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire, when, for instance, periods of “Russification” could shift with periods of “nativization”. Elements of this can also be found in the Circassian areas today, where local languages and history are being taught in schools and published in books, but due to enormous developments in the electronic media, especially in television and on the Internet, the Russian language has a strengthened position *vis-à-vis* the local languages. Still, despite significant differences between the three republics, the Russian language continues to play an important role as a *lingua franca* in these ethnically-mixed entities. When the weekly hours of teaching in local languages from 2011 were reduced as a result of a federal decision, it indirectly strengthened the role of the Russian language.<sup>153</sup>

The system of dominating ethnic groups is also found on the secondary level of the republics, which Wimmer has termed as “dominant minorities” (Wimmer 2004, 47). In Kabardino-Balkaria, Balkars regularly complain about the domination of the Kabardians, as do the Cherkess about the Karachai in Karachai-Cherkessia. In the republic of Adygea, Adygs and Russians are mutually complaining about each other. The closely related Turkish-speaking peoples of Balkars and Karachai are also undergoing a process of mobilization and increased cooperation as found among the Circassians.<sup>154</sup> These two parallel mobilization processes partly enhance each other, which is a by-product of the double-titular republic structure.

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<sup>153</sup> ‘Wikipedia has opened a Circassian language site (eastern dialect)’ (in Russian), *Elot.ru*, (25-03-2011), available at: [http://www.elot.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2318&Itemid=1](http://www.elot.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2318&Itemid=1).

<sup>154</sup> ‘In Kabardino-Balkaria, the public organization “Alan” conducted a public meeting Balkar’ (in Russian) and ‘Leaders of Karachai organisations in Karachai-Cherkessia prepare congress of repressed people in the North Caucasus’ (in Russian), *Caucasian Knot* (25-01-2011).

Since the 1960s, a process of ethnic or demographic homogenization has taken place in the North Caucasus, though at a slower speed in the west than in the eastern parts. Ethnic Russians have been steadily leaving the region in a process that began when the Balkars and the Karachai returned from exile in Central Asia in the late 1950s. This is a process that has parallels to the so-called process of “un-mixing of peoples” that took place in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union, which also took place on the level of the non-state units such as the republics in the North Caucasus (Brubaker 1996, 150). This could also be seen as a counter reaction to the demographic Russification of the Soviet era-enhanced by the North Caucasian re-ethnification processes since 1991. These tendencies increase the legitimacy of the type of self-determination found among the titular-nationalities of the North Caucasian peoples and, in some way, counteracts the Russification or ethnic Russian domination processes mentioned earlier. Internally in the republics, the ethnic homogenization processes are to some extent countered by the on-going process of urbanization, by which many villages have lost half of their population since the fall of the Soviet Union.<sup>155</sup>

## Conclusion

At first sight, the space for action within the civil society sector in Russia for an ethnic minority located in the periphery close to the Georgian border—an area widely perceived as being of strategic importance to Russia—appears reduced. This seems to be in line with the conclusions of reports by Freedom House and Transparency International in their annual assessments of the democratic developments in the Russian Federation. Still, by observing the activity level of the Circassian organizations, as well as their increasing numbers and the significantly rise in Circassian activity level on the Internet, it becomes clear that the space for action of the Circassians within the wider public sphere of the Russian Federation has actually been enlarged. The Circassian youth in particular has taken a lead role in this new process of enlarging the space for action of the Circassians, even though a significant part of this space is in cyberspace, which is also a part of reality and does not constitute a separate or artificial world. This role of Circassian cyberspace reflects similar tendencies in other parts of Russian society, where a larger space for action is generally found on the Internet than in the printed and electronic media.

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<sup>155</sup> A new programme encouraging ethnic Russians to move to the North Caucasus was presented in 2010 but has not yet materialized. This could mark a return of the demographic policies of the imperial and communist era.

The fact that a number of killings and acts of violence have affected Circassian activists and cultural personalities at the same time—and the perpetrators are rarely arrested and convicted—indicates that this type of civil society mobilization can be dangerous. Still, many activists state that they have gone beyond the “point of no return” and will continue their activities within the democratic framework of Russian law.

The strengthened ethnic mobilization and the tendency towards increased unity among the Circassian organizations in the North Caucasus represent a new platform for future action. The level of exchange and cooperation with the diaspora organizations is generally rising, as seen in relation to the campaign for recognition of the Circassian genocide. This new Circassian platform for civil society action could in the coming years be further strengthened through cooperation with other actors such as human rights organizations and academic institutions, from the centre of the federation as a type of strategic partner. When environmental organizations or anti-corruption bloggers have also protested against the Sochi Olympics, such parallel action has occurred. Another example was the statements from the Russian Academy of Science in 2010, when they acknowledged the Circassian claim of constituting one joint Circassian people—and not the four different peoples presently outlined based on divisions from the Stalin era. The Circassian mobilization on the Internet continues to widen, which increasingly includes cooperation with non-Circassian actors.

The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, as a high-profile international mega-event, has stimulated renewed mobilization among the Circassian diaspora, and little by little the same is happening among the Circassians in the North Caucasus. The timing of the event plays a double role in the mobilization as “Sochi” embodies both the time and space of their final eviction in 1864. In the renewed mobilization process since the mid-2000s, it has increasingly become popular to rephrase the “national tragedy” into an “act of genocide”. It appears evident that in the years remaining until the 150 years anniversary in 2014, the process of Circassian mobilization will continue to grow.

The combined role of youth and the Internet has, in the case of the Circassians, shown potential for the promotion of a democratization process in line with international trends. As such, many of the Internet-based actions of young Circassians constitute attempts at countering some of the autocratic

tendencies in Russia during the latter decade. Both the Circassian youth and Web 2.0 efforts illustrate the shift towards a new generation, where representatives from this second post-Soviet generation of youth are inspired by international trends on rights-based activism, while Web 2.0 represents the second generation Internet that is both qualitatively and quantitatively different than Web 1.0. So far, most youth representatives have—in spite of internal differences and calls for increased ethno-centrism—managed to demonstrate that ethno-cultural revival can be performed while simultaneously being modern and globally-oriented.

The increased functionalities of the Internet in Web 2.0 have clearly contributed to strengthening the Circassian mobilization and have resulted in steadily increasing involvement of Circassians. In terms of the form and tools applied in the Internet mediation process, the community-building element of Web 2.0, as used by Circassian actors, is quite different from the processes described by Benedict Anderson (1991) and Arjun Appadurai (2001) as print-capitalism and electronic-capitalism, respectively. The “digital-capitalism” of today’s Web 2.0 is more sprawling, grass-roots, and dialogue-oriented and is a less post-Soviet phenomenon, where the level of popular involvement is significantly larger than the more elite-oriented processes of the above mentioned earlier periods.

The Circassian mobilization is not just ethnic, but is also cultural, indigenous, and minority rights related. The framing of the Circassian mobilization as “ethnic” regularly results in allegations of nationalism from local and federal opponents, as well as from academic specialists in Russia. This often results in a dilemma where the rights of the Circassians as an indigenous minority are questioned and presented as a threat towards political stability.<sup>156</sup> This is obviously an awkward situation for an ethno-cultural minority group in a country like Russia, where the ongoing ethno-cultural revival of the ethnic Russians, as the dominating group in a nationalizing state, is widely regarded as more legitimate than similar processes among ethnic minorities in the North Caucasus. One North Caucasian observer has referred to this type of ethnic Russian dominance as “ethnocratization” (Sampiev 2008). This type of imbalance in the long run seems to enhance and fuel the Circassian mobilization. The 2014 Sochi Olympics has contributed to generating an international platform from which Circassian activists and organizations have launched an

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<sup>156</sup> Three Circassian organizations in the North Caucasus issued a statement in March 2011 protesting against what they called propaganda against nationalism as equal to chauvinism or xenophobia, while insisting on their rights to lobby for the rights and interests of the Circassians (‘What is Circassian nationalism?’, *Natpress.net*, 17-03-2011).



encounter with biased Russian history writing and other elements of discrimination on a much larger scale than before. This is just one example of how the Circassian organizations and cyber-activists increasingly challenge the authorities on local and federal level in Russia.

The transnational cooperation and linking between the Circassians minorities in Russia and the Circassian diaspora could be said to approach a level described by Rogers Brubaker as a triadic relationship-where Russia, in the role of the nationalizing state, is no longer just met with resistance from national minorities within the country, but is also faced with new transnational diaspora groups.

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## *Chapter 3*

### **Frontier Zones of Diaspora-Making: Circassian Organizations in Turkey**

After 150 years in relative oblivion as a scattered and forgotten people, the Circassians are now reemerging as a visible and internationally recognized ethnic group insisting on their place in the history books as well as on their contemporary rights as minority and diaspora groups in different national contexts. The Circassians—along with their historical North Caucasian homeland Circassia that was once situated between the Black Sea coast and the northern slopes of the Caucasus mountain range—were well known in the nineteenth century. Their century-long resistance to Russian conquest and colonization was followed by the international media and supported by official as well as unofficial actors from Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire. Following their final defeat in the 1860s, the majority of Circassians went into exile in Ottoman Turkey and, today, the largest contingent of Circassians—several million—are still found in Turkey, though an increasing part of the diaspora can also be found in the Middle East, Western Europe, and North America. In the Russian North Caucasus the Circassians of today includes the Adyge, the Cherkess, and the Kabardians, where they constitute titular-nationalities in three federal republics.<sup>157</sup>

Over the last couple of years, new Circassian organizations and Internet-based media have emerged and taken advantage of the new options within Turkish civil society, which include increased rights for minorities to establish their own organizations and increased freedom of speech. This ongoing process of reform and democratization in Turkey includes adaptation to standards of minority rights and so on, as required in the rapprochement with the European Union. The Circassian organizations are becoming key actors in the contemporary redefinition of Circassian identity from being regarded as a Turkish subgroup into an ethnic minority group in a modern Western understanding. The new organizations and the media are challenging the kind of status quo that has existed among

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<sup>157</sup> The republics of Adygea, Karachai-Cherkessia, and Kabardino-Balkaria.

the diaspora for decades, and this has resulted in the development of new lines of division within the Circassian communities.

Based on interviews with representatives of Circassian organizations, online material, and a subsequent mapping of a number of key Circassian organizations and their activities in Turkey, it is the aim of this chapter to investigate how the arrival of new organizations with new priorities has affected the diaspora community in Turkey and created alternative lines of division and potential conflicts.<sup>158</sup> This chapter explores the ongoing repositioning among the Circassian diaspora organizations and discusses the resulting politicization and polarization. In addressing this new space for action within civil society in Turkey, I have drawn inspiration from two different civil society discourses: (a) the role of civil society organizations in democratization processes, especially in the former eastern Europe, upon which much of the democratization process in Turkey has been modeled; and (b) the role of civil society organizations in developing and promoting a postcolonial agenda, which is rarely discussed in relation to Turkey but is highly relevant in relation to the priorities and actions of the Circassian organizations. This twinning of democratization and postcolonialism encapsulates the process of redefining the Circassians as an ethnic minority as well as a diaspora in Turkey.

The recent developments among the Circassian organizations are not just affected and inspired by the democratic reform process in Turkey but also by the overall wider globalization process. Drawing inspiration from Saskia Sassen's (2009) theory on frontier zones, I will discuss the role of modern globalized cities such as Istanbul and Ankara as arenas for the creation of this type of frontier zones. This will include a discussion on the role of the Circassian organizations in Turkey in the increasing transnationalization of the Circassian diaspora in general. Selected organizations in Turkey and especially in Istanbul will be included in order to illustrate recent trends.<sup>159</sup> The establishment of such new Circassian frontier zones could signify not just the establishment of new alternative spaces of Circassian mobilization and reidentification, but could also constitute a significant new—national as well as transnational—alternative space of resistance toward the Circassian situation in the North Caucasus. The constitution and character of this type of alternative

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<sup>158</sup> Interviews were conducted in Turkey in 2008 and 2010. Over the same period, I visited and conducted interviews with representatives of Circassian diaspora organizations in several other countries.

<sup>159</sup> The term organization refers to a broad range of civil society organizations including associations, umbrella organizations, foundations, nongovernmental organizations and so on.

space that appears to be different both in terms of form and content as compared to what it was earlier will be discussed.

## **Historical Background**

In 1864, Circassia disappeared from the map after many decades of war with the Russian Empire, and most of the Circassians fled their homeland for the Ottoman Empire. For many centuries, Circassia had existed as a loosely connected premodern state or union of related tribes speaking the Circassian language, which belong to the North-Western Caucasian type (Hansen and Krag 2002, 62). The Muslim religion was introduced by the Crimean Tatars during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was consolidated during the many years of war with Russia.

In Russia the war is referred to as part of the Caucasian Wars, while the Circassians (especially among the diaspora) increasingly refer to it as the Russian-Circassian War that lasted for 101 years—from 1763 to 1864 (Hatk 1992; Jaimoukha 2001). According to the official Russian position—then as well as now—the right to the territory of Circassia was ceded to Russia from the Ottoman Empire as part of the Adrianopolis-Treaty of 1829 (Jaimoukha 2001, 63). As the war went on for decades and new generations became involved, the animosities between the warring sides worsened. In the end, almost all Circassian villages were burnt down, and almost all Circassians driven out of their place of residence. Those who stayed in the Caucasus were also relocated. That the majority of Circassians chose to flee came as a surprise to both Russian and Ottoman authorities and resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands during the flight in overcrowded ships, on the way to relocation in different parts of the Ottoman Empire. The number of casualties during the many years of war and the exodus is difficult to assess but various estimates refer to as many as 800,000 (Jaimoukha 2001, 68). More conservative estimates put the figure at half a million dead, with approximately one million Circassians surviving.

As far back as the 1830s, Great Britain had become a key player in the geopolitical competition with the Russian Empire for influence in the Caucasus, as the Ottoman Empire gradually weakened. Several British explorers, traders, and diplomats visited Circassia during the period and the geopolitical competition generated strong interest for what came to be known as “the Circassian



Question” in the international media of the time.<sup>160</sup> Key British actors contributed to the design of a new flag as a joint symbol of the united tribes of Circassia and a declaration of independence was published in the international media in order to counter Russian claims on the territory. Formal British recognition of Circassian independence followed in 1838. All this resulted in a number of British publications on Circassian issues and many documents can be found in the British archives. Today, many of these documents are the object of research and many of them have been published over the last two decades. Such documents play a key role in the ongoing ethnic revival among Circassians, including the formal appeals for recognition of their displacement as an act of genocide, in which they are used as part of the general documentation process.

During the many years of Soviet rule, the three above mentioned Circassian subgroups experienced a gradually increased institutionalization as ethno-territorial groups and administrative units within the North Caucasus. As a characteristic part of Soviet nationality policies, this was accompanied by divide-and-rule measures: the Kabardians and the Cherkess (a new subgroup that is one of several new inventions of so-called Soviet ethnic engineering) were not placed in the same republic, but today still constitute titular-nationalities in the republics of Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachai-Cherkessia. The Circassians today once more find themselves located in a border zone close to Georgia and Abkhazia—a location that gained new significance after the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, and the subsequent Russian recognition of neighboring Abkhazia as an independent country.

Sochi, in the deep south of Russia on the Black Sea coast, has been chosen to host the Winter Olympics in 2014. The Circassian name for Sochi is Sache and it is a place of high symbolic importance for the Circassians as this was the last place in the Caucasus that Circassians left in 1864, after losing the final battle of the war. The Olympic Games in 2014 in Sochi thus managed to encapsulate an absolutely key element in the time and space of Circassian mythology, which is already on the agenda of the ongoing Circassian revival. In this way the Circassian Question has again been elevated to a higher level on the international scene.

## **Contemporary Circasian Diaspora Trends**

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<sup>160</sup> The terms the “Circassian Question” or the “Circassian Issue” have recently begun to enter the vocabulary of the Russian media.

The aim of this section is to introduce key themes and theories with which to discuss the situation of the Circassian organizations in Turkey. This includes the parallel processes of reidentification as a diaspora and an ethnic minority respectively; processes that are unfolding within the framework of a civil society in which potentially increased space for action is appearing as part of the ongoing democratization process. These processes interact with ongoing globalization processes—including increased urbanization—and create overlapping spaces that can be characterized as being not just global, or just national, or just local. Saskia Sassen's theories of frontier zones (of globalization) will be included to discuss these phenomena. All the above mentioned thematic overlaps reflect the complex contexts of the Circassian diaspora and their organizations in Turkey today.

There is significant agreement with regard to the motivation of the Circassian organizations, in which all representatives stress the need to preserve culture and identity that are widely regarded as threatened by assimilation in all countries of their scattered communities. This has especially been accentuated by the prospect of losing their language in the course of just one generation. Among many Circassians active in the organizations, this implies a need to act immediately, as in 10 or 15 years it may already be too late. This apparent unity among the Circassian organizations as to their motivation display a contradiction also often found among other modern diaspora groups, whereby new urban and globalized living conditions, on the one hand, result in the establishment of new organizations setting new agendas while, on the other, they are simultaneously losing the language that used to be regarded as one of the fundamental pillars of their identity. The threat of loss of language has come as a surprise to many Circassians and has potential repercussions regarding the issue of repatriation of Circassians to the homeland, where command of the Circassian language is regarded as crucial.

The first Circassian association in Turkey was established in 1908 but was closed down by the authorities with the outbreak of the World War I. Only in 1950, when the election victory of the Democratic Party ended the long period of de facto one-party rule since 1923, were the Circassians again allowed to establish associations, though only focusing on cultural activities (Bas 2008, 13). As a result of the breakup of the Soviet Union, and especially the subsequent outbreak of violent conflicts in Chechnya (1994) and Abkhazia (1992), a process of redefinition of identity began

among the diaspora Caucasians.<sup>161</sup> These violent conflicts resulted in a new and more visible role for the Circassian/Caucasian organizations in Turkey, whereby these organizations took part in the provision of humanitarian assistance, support for refugees and different forms of support to the parts of the homeland affected by conflict and war (Hansen and Krag 2002, 102). The Turkish media started to cover the activities of the Caucasians in Turkey in relation to these wars, which increased their visibility in Turkish society.

The history of Caucasian exile in first Ottoman and subsequently Kemalist Turkey has, on the one hand, resulted in a confusing use of the word “Circassian” as equivalent to “Caucasian,” and especially “North Caucasian” or “Caucasian Mountain Peoples.” On the other hand, it has also led to widespread solidarity and interaction among the Caucasians in Turkey—especially among the so-called mountain peoples, mostly from the North Caucasus. This has resulted in a contradiction whereby “Circassian” (“Cherkes” in Turkish language) is the term most used in Turkey in general, while most of the organizations—old as well as new—are named “Caucasian.” Although most of the activities may deal with Circassian issues, other issues of concern to the (North) Caucasian peoples are also included—especially in relation to Abkhazians and Chechens.

The process of reidentification along ethnically defined lines began with the fall of the Soviet Union, although many still state their all-Caucasian solidarity—an example of the modern hybrid identities at stake in many Caucasian diaspora communities. The organizations in the other diaspora countries almost all use the term “Circassian,” albeit with different levels of inclusiveness toward other North Caucasian peoples.<sup>162</sup> As a result of many years under Kemalist rule, “Circassian” is, in Turkey today, widely considered as a Turkish sub-ethnos—the term ethnic minority referring mainly to non-Muslim groups (Karaomanoglu 2010).

## Diaspora

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<sup>161</sup> A rough estimate of the ethnic dispersion within the Circassian/Caucasian organizations: 75-80% Circassians, 10-20% Abkhazians, 5-10% Chechens. Personal communication Istanbul 2008, not verified.

<sup>162</sup> I have chosen to use the term “Circassian” organizations, and my writing here is part of a wider study on the Circassian diaspora and their organizations.

According to William Safran a diaspora group is generally characterized as a particular group that has been forced into exile from its area of origin to an area of resettlement—often for long periods, marked by anxiety or oppression (Safran 1991, 83). I shall use Safran's six diaspora characteristics to outline the Circassian diaspora situation in Turkey.

Safran suggests that the concept of diaspora be applied to expatriate minority communities whose members share several of the following characteristics: (1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "centre" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; (2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history and achievements; (3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; (4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; (5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and (6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship (Safran 1991, 83).

After many generations and almost 150 years in exile great differences can be found within the Circassian diaspora as to their collective memory of their homeland. The current Circassian revival does, however, include many discussions and negotiations on the role of a common vision, memory, and myth about their homeland and has reactualized these issues. Regarding Safran's third issue, the Circassians are generally considered to be a well-integrated group in Turkey for many generations and are widely accepted by the host community. The ongoing redefinition of the Circassians as an ethnic minority group appears to be broadly accepted among the Turkish public, although this process is still in its early phases. Some Circassians express hope that they or their descendants will be able to return to the homeland but few believe in actual repatriation in the short to medium term. Most fear that it could take many years before the conditions are right. Cautious optimism can be found in relation to the longer term perspectives. The issue of repatriation is considered important by most Circassian organizations, although this is generally regarded as an issue marked by failed expectations.

Regarding Safran's fifth and sixth characteristics, some Circassians have been assimilated in Turkey, while many are still in the early phases of rediscovering their ethnic identity. These characteristics of homeland relationship can therefore be found although they are still often absent or undergoing redevelopment. The knowledge of the homeland among the diaspora Circassians vary. In most cases, family links to the homeland still have to be established, although the prevailing family- and clan-structure formally makes this possible. A surprisingly large number of Circassians have still not visited the homeland, which is often regarded as distant and inaccessible due Russian and post-Soviet culture and bureaucracy.

These are differences that—together with the lack of skills in Russian language—largely function as demotivating factors in relation to potential repatriation. Visits to the homeland could increase in the near future due to the Russian decision in 2010 to remove the visa regulations for Turkish citizens. The activists (online as well as off line), board members, and so on, of the Circassian/Caucasian organizations—together with writers, academics and others—constitute the vanguard or frontrunners in the ongoing process of redefining the homeland relationship among the Circassian diaspora.<sup>163</sup>

Robin Cohen (1997, 235) describes the strong potential for social mobilization contained in belonging to a so-called victim diaspora, where a narrative of forced exile plays a key role.<sup>164</sup> This also plays a key role in the ongoing redefinition of Circassian history and identity among the diaspora. Cohen further describes the importance of (imaginative) rediscovery of "hidden histories" as central to this type of social movement and goes on to stress how many diaspora representations have the character of "imaginary reunification." This can function as an attempt to recreate the coherence lost by dispersion and fragmentation (Hall 1990, 224). Almost all Circassian organizations, websites and activists of different kinds refer to "hidden histories" on different levels and of different types as part of their motivation and purpose. For many Circassians, the discovery of a history that moves beyond the abstract mythologies and taboos of their childhood days has been a revelation. According to Shami, these processes have resulted in changed homeland relations—a transformation from an abstract space into a more concrete territory (Shami 1998, 642). However,

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<sup>163</sup> Today, a significant number of Circassians have experienced secondary and tertiary migrations through, for instance, urbanization processes within Turkey and through (mostly labor) migration to large cities in Western Europe, where they are generally known as "Turks."

<sup>164</sup> A "victim diaspora" is a "classical diaspora forced into exile such as the Jewish, African, Armenian diasporas" (Cohen 1997, 235). Cohen defines the other four diaspora types as labor, trade, imperial, and cultural diasporas.

Cohen's considerations on the role of "imaginary reunification" seem highly relevant, as repatriation is a difficult issue. Many diaspora Circassians have abstract dreams of future repatriation but very few have actually returned and very few feel attracted by life in the Russian society of today's North Caucasus. The many references to the historical homeland or motherland found among the diaspora therefore tend to support the notion of an "imaginary return," which has been further enhanced through the use of the Internet, where many individual actors from outside the organizations are also taking part in producing representations of the homeland. The tendency toward virtual return could even replace or diminish wishes for an actual return. Kaya identifies this as a significant shift among contemporary diaspora as compared to conventional forms of diasporic formation, as they can now no longer be "characterized by the overwhelming wish to return" (Kaya 2005, 1).

The rising use of the term diaspora in a number of different contexts has led scholars such as Nicholas Van Hear, Nauja Kleist, and Simon Turner to call for a reassessment of the use of the term in order to perceive diaspora as a process instead of as a fixed category of identity (Turner 2008, 746). Turner has suggested using the term "diasporize": "... to *diasporize* expresses an active process, resembling Kleist's (2007) proposal to perceive diaspora as 'becoming' rather than 'being'" (Turner 2008, 746). Recent diaspora politics represent a potential empowerment of diasporas as groups with transnational connections (Ong 2003, 88) and it is a global trend that "... migrant groups are seen as potential political actors" (Kleist 2008, 127). I will return to the making of the Circassian diaspora as an ongoing process later in this chapter.<sup>165</sup>

## **Ethnic Minorities**

As part of the democratic transformation in Turkey, ethnic minorities such as the Circassians are currently undergoing a process of redefinition. This is a challenging process that encompasses an overall shift within Turkish society, from a strongly institutionalized monolithic national Turkish

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<sup>165</sup> Other relevant discussions on the making and unmaking of diasporas could include Rogers Brubaker (1996, 2005) and Nicholas Van Hear (1998)

identity into a new form of multicultural diversity (Karaosmanoglu 2010, 208; Clark 2006, 245).

This process of transformation into a more heterogeneous society is, however, only halfway through and the new status of ethnic minorities is still not fully secured within the constitution.<sup>166</sup>

Large parts of Turkish society are still unfamiliar with the new type of dual identities represented by ethnic minorities (Karaosmanoglu 2010, 208). Nevertheless, a number of ethnic minority organizations have begun to utilize the increased space for action within the Turkish public sphere, thereby gradually strengthening their visibility and legitimacy. This also supports the general redefinition of Turkey as a heterogeneous society. According to some observers, the fundamental character of the ongoing changes could ultimately threaten the contemporary status of Turkey as a unified state (Köker 2010, 66). Yet the popular support for the proposed constitutional changes in the referendum in September 2010 indicates that an increasing proportion of the population of Turkey support the ongoing process of democratic reforms.<sup>167</sup> The process of redefining the ethnic identity of the Circassians is not as controversial as is the case, for instance, of the Kurds, where issues of separatism and terrorism often complicate the process or may be used by various political actors to derail the process.<sup>168</sup> Such undertakings could threaten to halt or delay the general process of redefining the status of ethnic minorities—though most observers seem to believe that the overall process of democratization in Turkey has moved beyond the point of no return (Köker 2010, 65). Several civil society organizations are actively promoting and supporting a call for a reassessment of the past in Turkey in relation to a number of crimes targeting different ethnic minorities (*Today's Zaman*, 03-07-2010).

Such processes could increase the visibility of the Circassians in Turkey. The ongoing redefinition of ethnic identity among the diaspora Circassians includes an element of long-distance nationalism—to use a term from Benedict Anderson (1998)—that is considered controversial by some observers and authorities in Russia. Such processes of redefinition can also lead to the potential branding of ethnic minorities as “nationalist” by states that themselves practice “state-nationalism” in a more or less similar manner. This is sometimes referred to as “state-nationalism”

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<sup>166</sup> Caucasian Forum: statement 2010: “Yes, but not enough” ([www.kafkasyaforumu.org](http://www.kafkasyaforumu.org)).

<sup>167</sup> “Turkey says yes to democratic transformation,” *Today's Zaman* (13-09-2010).

<sup>168</sup> Kurdish struggles for cultural, indigenous or minority rights are often met with un-proportional force by the authorities in Turkey, where many Kurdish politicians, writers and activist are jailed or otherwise politically persecuted. This is one of the major obstacles to achieving formal status as EU accession country. Corlu stated in 1993 that possibilities for Circassian civil society action widely depended on the future democratization of Turkey including rights of Kurds as minorities (Corlu 1993, 18).

versus “micro-nationalism” (Pollock 2001, 34-36). Renewed action among minority or diaspora groups such as the Circassians can constitute a response to state-nationalism. In spite of the official and highly institutionalized status of state-nationalism in both Turkey and Russia<sup>169</sup>, these nation-states are still undergoing changes in the redefinition of their national identities and further Circassian responses can be anticipated.

## Civil Society and Space for Action

“Civil society” is the public sphere or arena that the Circassian organizations operate within, and strengthening civil society has increasingly become a priority in the ongoing Turkish democratization process. This is in line with Vaclav Havel’s statement from 1993: “...*a strong civil society is a crucial condition of a strong democracy. Empowering civil society is a central concern for the project of democracy...*” (cited from Flyvbjerg 1998, 210. Emphasis added). The democratization process has become a political strategy in Turkey and is strongly supported by the European Union—inspired by the democratic transition programs from Eastern Europe—through the ongoing negotiations on rapprochement with the European Union and the provision of funding for institutional reforms and civil society development (Kuzmanovic 2008, 246).<sup>170</sup> “Civil society” is a term marked by many different definitions—today as well as historically—which largely reflect the great diversity found among the different civil society actors. According to one short and often used definition, civil society is a third sector with relative autonomy in relation to the state and the market but often dominated by these latter two ([www.lse.ac.uk](http://www.lse.ac.uk)). A related definition simply characterizes civil society as the sum of organizations outside the market and the state. David Lewis has presented an alternative definition inspired by Antonio Gramsci: “...civil society is the arena, separate from state and market, in which ideological hegemony is contested, implying that civil society contained a wide range of organizations which both challenged and upheld the existing order” (Lewis 2001, 2). The different definitions sometimes refer to the different contexts in which they are applied. Lewis, for instance, discusses civil society in relation to development support to non-Western countries and stresses the potential function of civil society as a field of conflict and resistance, as opposed to the more consensus-oriented understanding represented by the former

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<sup>169</sup> In spite of formally constituting a federal state.

<sup>170</sup> As part of the accession process EU launched a civil society dialogue program in 2004, but so far Circassian or Caucasian organizations have not yet participated ([avrupa.info.tr](http://avrupa.info.tr))



definitions (2001, 4). The consensus-oriented version is mostly linked to a normative understanding of civil society as a category in Western donor programs that can be applied in very different contexts: from support to democratic transition in Eastern Europe (and Turkey) to development programs in sub-Saharan Africa. These two different directions of civil society understanding represent different levels of politicization, which I will return to later in this chapter.<sup>171</sup>

“Space for action” is a term often mentioned in relation to discussions on civil society, although not necessarily defined. According to Alison Van Rooy (1998), space for action constitutes one of the six viewpoints that categorizes the concept of civil society.<sup>172</sup> This has led Hakkarainen and others to the following formulation of civil society as a “space for action”: “Civil society has also been used as a metaphor for the space organisations occupy, usually described as the enabling environment in which they prosper (or fade) rather than the more battle-ridden terrain of Gramsci’s writings. Civil society is, together with the state and market one of the three ‘spheres’ that interface in the making of democratic societies” (Hakkarainen et al. 2002, 3). That an increasing space for action within the civil society sector in Turkey has developed over the last couple of years was confirmed in all interviews. This is also substantiated by Daniella Kuzmanovic, who states that “...civic forces have gradually gained more room for manoeuvre vis-à-vis an authoritarian state” (Kuzmanovic 2008, 246).

The Circassian and Caucasian organizations in Turkey have not yet been affected by the notion of civil society as a funding category—which has been a trend among both national and international donor programs (for development support) for a number of years and identified as one of the questionable effects of the EU civil society funding schemes in Turkey (Kuzmanovic 2008, 242). Yet the Circassian and Caucasian organizations are obviously inspired by prevailing international notions of civil society activism, rights-based lobbying and so on. The orientation toward international notions of human rights, freedom of speech, cultural and religious diversity, and the right to act (politically) and voice concerns can be found especially among the new Circassian organizations, and particularly among the youth and youth organizations, as illustrated by the Caucasian Forum and, for instance, the all-Turkish multiethnic organization Young Civilians. Both

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<sup>171</sup> Much criticism of the use of the term civil society can be found including, for instance, the tendency to idealize civil society as actors of democratic change (Grugel and Uhlin 2009). Lately, the term has also been applied to discussions on, for instance, cultural diversity, and social cohesion (Murray 2002, 2).

<sup>172</sup> The other five are value, collective noun, historical moment, anti-hegemony, and antidote to state (Hakkarainen et al. 2002, 2).

organizations were started by students but have since moved on to become more widely recognized groups with a voice and potential influence in Turkish society.

## **Frontier Zones**

In relation to contemporary globalization processes, the sociologist Saskia Sassen has stated the need to rethink spatial hierarchies, the following understanding of which has been taken for granted: local < national < global (i.e., the global are larger than the national, which are larger than the local) (Sassen 2001, 272). Global action mostly takes place within national and local settings on the part of actors localized within the national (and the local) level, which has led Sassen to develop the term “frontier zones”—or “frontier zones (of globalization)” —to describe this phenomenon (2001, 275).<sup>173</sup> The global is a partial condition, which indicates the way frontier zones are defined as a zone of overlap between two or more states, while simultaneously constituting an additionality, something unique. A space that is partly national and partly global—not exclusively one or the other (2001, 260). Sassen outlines two markers of frontier zones: first, they are “spaces of imbrications, of mixing, of interdependence. They are not lines where civilisations clash” and secondly “they are spaces where the work of teasing out the rules of engagement/encounters can happen” and where there is “...work to be done” (Sassen 2009, 1).

“Power and domination can be expected from ‘the national level’,” but Sassen stress that simultaneously “...an incipient and part denationalisation of domains once understood and/or constructed as national” can take place (Sassen 2001, 261). In the same anthology, Arjun Appadurai states: “I am among those analysts who are inclined to see globalisation as a definite marker of a new crisis for the sovereignty of nation-states” (2001, 4). Safran further states that “...one becomes increasingly aware that the ‘nation state’ is an oddity” (1999, 255). As the discussion above reveals, there seems to be no doubt that a shift from the national to the global level has occurred—I will return to this shift in relation to the transnationalization of the issues dealt with by the Circassian organizations.

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<sup>173</sup> The use of the term “frontier zone” has been criticized from different sides, for instance: “...frontierism smacks of opportunism” (Sassen 2009, 4). Some commentators have found the term frontier zone’s relation to colonization processes and geopolitical domination controversial or provoking.

Sassen has adapted the term frontier zone to include a discussion of the function of global cities as frontier zones: “The space constituted by the global grid of global cities, a space with new economic and political potentialities, is perhaps one of the most strategic spaces for the formation of transnational identities and communities” (Sassen 2000, 3). According to Sassen, “Cities are a space for politics that is far more concrete than that of the national state” (2000, 3) and “...it is also a strategic frontier zone for those who lack power, those who are disadvantaged, outsiders, discriminated minorities” (2007, 1). There is no doubt that the urban environment in which the Circassian organizations of today are located has played an enabling role. Following many years with a predominantly rural location, increased urbanization has contributed to the rise in the level and the type of organizational activity, respectively.<sup>174</sup> The role of youth, hitherto expected to participate primarily in cultural events, such as dance classes, has shifted into a more active and visible role—though still with the respect for elders required by Caucasian cultural tradition. Students have played a key role in developing new organizations and new activism and the universities of the big cities such as Istanbul and Ankara have functioned as localities for meeting and mobilizing. The long tradition of Circassian associations and foundations supporting students who arrive in these cities has played a facilitating role in this process. In return, students support some of the activities of the associations and foundations as volunteers but also increasing challenge these by additionally getting involved in other types of activities.

Youth also play a key role through their use of the Internet to participate in transnational networking—whether this takes place within an organization or through individual use of, for instance, the new social networks such as Facebook, YouTube, and so on, where Circassians have become increasingly visible. As Sassen has noted: “...through the new network technologies local initiatives become part of a global network of activism without losing the focus on specific local struggles. It enables a new type of cross-border political activism ... Digital networks are contributing to the production of new kinds of interconnections underlying what appear as fragmented topographies, whether at the global or at the local level.” (2007, 2). According to Sassen, the global cities become strategic sites for these new types of operation, and this is a description that increasingly fits the Circassian situation. The global circuit of the Internet has

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<sup>174</sup> Gerard Chaliand has observed that—in spite of the otherwise strongly institutionalized Kemalist nationalism—there was a feeling in the countryside that nothing was forgotten (Chaliand 2010, 1). This type of resistance to Turkish state-nationalism is probably of key importance for the ongoing reproduction of collective Circassian memory as it unfolds in today’s urbanized context.

become widely used by individual Circassians in transnational discussions on identity and history and the organizations are increasingly using the Internet to facilitate national as well as transnational links. For some of the new organizations, this is an important way of becoming visible and necessary for continued mobilization of support. The ease with which digitized linking can be carried out and can include different types of Internet platforms results in a multiplication effect, which underlines the strategic potential of the digital network.

According to Sassen, today's global cities often constitute a postcolonial frontier space—that is, a network of global cities that can function as a space for action directed against the former colonial center by using contemporary language, methods, and institutions. This underlines Lewis's notions of civil society as a battlefield: "...Gramscian ideas about civil society have long been relevant to understandings of organised resistance to colonialism" (Lewis 2001, 4). The arrival of the new Circassian organizations and their opposition to the older organizations illustrates the creation of this type of battlefield as a new space for civil society action in today's Turkey. However, they are not challenging their "own" state in the same way as they challenge the state of their historical homeland. A significant number of these acts are addressing the contemporary Russian authorities, as successor to the Russian Empire that colonized the Caucasus in the nineteenth century, in a typical postcolonial manner, whereby demands for recognition and a rewriting of history are made. These endeavors have increasingly become an issue of transnational cooperation between Circassian organizations, especially within the diaspora, but have also included cooperation with one of the organizations in the North Caucasus, the Circassian Congress. The fact that key activists from the Circassian Congress had to go into exile because of this kind of action illustrates how this transnational space for action can contract as powerful actors respond when challenged within this "battlefield". Actions and manifestations that may be free from consequences in most of the diaspora locations may seriously affect or damage partners in the homeland.

## **Organizational Trends**

The ongoing polarization among the Circassian diaspora organizations in Turkey can best be illustrated by the line of division developed between the older and more culturally oriented and the newer and more politically oriented organizations. The cultural orientation includes focusing on

traditional music and dance activities, promoting cultural traditions and cooperating with the authorities in Russia on, for instance, student exchanges. The newer and more politically oriented organizations focus on modern activism and advocacy efforts, which includes voicing issues regarded as controversial by the Russian authorities. There is generally a high level of mutual distrust between the representatives of the two categories, which often includes accusations of, for instance, being controlled by Russia or being ethno-nationalistic.

The positions of the older and more culturally oriented organizations are represented by Kafder and Kaffed, respectively. Kafder—the Caucasian Cultural Associations—has 58 branches in Turkey and began operating in 1950 when only culturally oriented associations were permitted to be established by the Turkish authorities. Kaffed—the Federation of Caucasian Associations—functions as an umbrella organization for the Kafders and is responsible for overall policy making, international contracts, including with the homeland, and overall planning of the annual Memorial Day on May 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>175</sup> Kafder/Kaffed have played a significant role in maintaining Circassian cultural traditions and have become a strongly institutionalized structure within the Circassian diaspora community in Turkey.

The new and more politically oriented organizations began operating in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, when the overall democratization process in Turkey became more open toward the establishment of new forms of organizations. These positions are exemplified by the lobbying and think-tank-oriented Caucasian House of Social and Strategic Research Centre (CH) and the youth activist organization Caucasian Forum (CF). Both organizations were motivated by frustrations with the agenda set (or not set) by Kafder/Kaffed and inspired by operational modalities of civil society organizations in the modern democracies of Europe and elsewhere. A different type of role, which can be labeled as a kind of in-between type being both cultural and political, is played by the foundations that were allowed to establish from the 1970s on. For instance, the two foundations in Istanbul have played an important role by establishing Caucasian libraries and archives, providing scholarships for Caucasian/Circassian students, and so on. The foundations also represent a link in the development of Circassian/Caucasian organizational history in modern Turkey.

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<sup>175</sup> Kafkasfederasyonu.org.

One example of the actions of the new and more politically oriented organizations is the NoSochi2014.com website that was launched in 2010 as an updated and renewed version of the earlier OlympicGenocide.org website.<sup>176</sup> The new website was initiated by Caucasian Forum and organized as a transnational protest against the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia with the support of Circassian diaspora organizations in Turkey, the Middle East, Western Europe, and North America. Strategic use of the Internet is a priority for Caucasian Forum and this can be achieved relatively inexpensively while still maintaining a professional standard by using IT-skills already present among the youth activists—potentially supplemented by the skills of activists in diaspora organizations in other countries.

Though still at a relatively low level, transnational cooperation with other diaspora organizations has increased, which is a tendency that can be expected to grow further in the near future. In connection with events of May 21, 2010, diaspora organizations from around the world cooperated by using the same design for visual communication on posters, flyers, websites, and so on. In May 2010, CF for the first time arranged a large public demonstration in the center of Istanbul on the same day that Kaffed held its traditional commemoration event at the Kefken caves outside Istanbul, which marked a new step in the polarization and several organizations such as Caucasian House supported the arrangement.

The fact that most Circassian organizations in Turkey are also Caucasian and generally obtain support from other Caucasians in relation to many of their activities is an example of modern hybrid identities functioning side by side and often overlapping. They are also used to operating in multiethnic and regionally defined fields, which also functions as a kind of antidote to the threat of exclusiveness, which is a dilemma facing many ethnically defined organizations.<sup>177</sup>

### **Transnational Cooperation**

The same tendencies toward polarization and politicization can be identified in relation to most of the Circassian diaspora organizations in the rest of the world. For instance, in the United States,

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<sup>176</sup> [www.nosochi2014.com](http://www.nosochi2014.com).

<sup>177</sup> Other layers of the hybrid identities include, for instance, sub-Circassian ethnic groups, family- or clan affiliation, the Turkish national level and other relevant categories such as religion, place, region, and so on.

where the relatively new organization, the Circassian Cultural Institute, has become one of the most politically oriented of all the newer organizations, while the older Circassian Benevolent Association represents a cautious and more culturally oriented approach. In Western Europe, the many small and geographically scattered Circassian associations in five countries have established a Federation of European Circassians (Euroxase). They tend to place themselves more independently than the Federation (Kaffed) in Turkey and can therefore be placed in an in-between category as both culturally and politically oriented. In the Middle East, the Circassian organizations' room for maneuvering as civil society actors in authoritarian or semiauthoritarian states can be relatively limited, though great differences can be observed from place to place and from time to time. Several have increasingly started to be in contact with diaspora organizations in other countries and developments in Turkey are being followed and could serve as future inspiration.

The shift toward increased polarization is also illustrated by the fact that most of the newer organizations have dissociated themselves from the International Circassian Association (ICA), and regular discussions take place with regard to establishing of a new and different kind of international Circassian body.<sup>178</sup> ICA was established as an international Circassian organization following the fall of the Soviet Union—in line with similar organizational initiatives among other post-Soviet ethnic groups—with the task of generally promoting cooperation between the diaspora and the homeland, including promoting repatriation from the diaspora to the homeland. ICA chose to locate its headquarters in Nalchik in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria and, after a couple of years, under increasing pressure from the Russian authorities it was taken over by a new leadership. Since then, ICA has been mainly involved in promoting cultural activities (Tlisova 2008, 16). The new and more politically oriented organizations in the diaspora have strongly criticized ICA for failing to place key Circassian issues on the agenda and for becoming a hindrance to transnational Circassian cooperation.

Transnational cooperation was initially limited among the new organizations in Turkey but has recently gained momentum; cooperation with diaspora organizations in North America has especially increased—as can be seen in the case of the NoSochi2014 website. This has led to wider

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<sup>178</sup> In late 2010, a new international organization emerged from New Jersey, United States with connection to the CCI: the International Circassian Council (ICC). Representatives from the ICC went to Estonia to seek support for formal recognition of the Circassian genocide. ([www.windowoneurasia.blogspot.com](http://www.windowoneurasia.blogspot.com), 07-10-2010).

cooperation spanning three continents. In this case, the main language is English, which is the preferred language in key issues of transnational cooperation. In general, the issue of choice of language is challenging to most Circassian organizations. The use of Turkish on the Internet also includes organizations in Europe and North America. Other key Internet languages include Arabic and Russian. Language is an important factor when it comes to choice of websites by the Circassians. Choice of language can therefore facilitate a kind of informal transnational network—defined partly by language. Choice of language can lead to what Benedict Anderson has labeled “segregated networks,” which can have an exclusionist character.<sup>179</sup> Yet, as mentioned above most Circassians also operate within other types of web-based platforms that can be defined as multiethnic or regional—for instance, all-Caucasian. Anyway, Turkish is already a lingua franca among many Circassians, and this is shared with other Caucasians in many countries.

The first transnational issue that marked the new and more polarized approach was the application for the exile in the nineteenth century to be recognized as an act of genocide, and this application included a high number of historical documents. This was first initiated in 2005 by the new organization, the Circassian Congress, from the Republic of Adygea in the Caucasus, and was addressed to the Russian Parliament. When they rejected the application, it was forwarded in 2006 to the European Parliament and to the Council of Europe—a move that was also supported by many diaspora organizations. The appeal was signed by 20 Circassian organizations, including several from Turkey, but not by the old associations (Kafder) or their federation (Kaffed). This was one of the first experiences of a new kind of transnational cooperation through the use of international institutions in professionally prepared lobbying efforts. It also resulted in increased pressure from the Russian authorities on key activists in the Circassian Congress, which was more or less forced into passiveness and some activists forced to flee Russia. This illustrates the fact that new transnational and politicized spaces can be established but that the cost of cooperation may be high for organizations in the homeland, where the space for action is somewhat limited.

Both the protests against the Sochi Olympics and the applications for formal recognition of the exile as an act of genocide also included serious question marks with regard to official Russian history writing. The campaigning in relation to the 2014 Olympics, in particular, has gained increasing attention in the Russian media—especially on the Internet.

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<sup>179</sup> nettime.org, 1997, 6.



In 2010, the Moscow Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences decided to reclassify the Circassian exile as a “forced resettlement,” which represents a new opening toward discussing the Circassian exile in Russia.<sup>180</sup> This could be the first in a number of potential civil society alliances whereby organizations or institutions based in Moscow could promote increased compliance with Circassian claims as part of their rights-based approach. There appears to be a significantly larger space for action on the part of Circassian civil society within Russian cyberspace than within the nonvirtual civil society sector in the North Caucasus.

Maximilian Forte has developed an analytic model for electronic revival among marginalized minorities or indigenous groups, through which they can achieve visibility, embodiment, recognition, and authenticity in a manner similar to Eric Hobsbawn’s notions of “invention of tradition” through use of the Internet (Forte 2006, 145). These tendencies are part of what have been labeled “digital diaspora,” in which homeland relations can be virtually redefined and links that had disappeared be created or recreated (Brinkerhoff 2009). The Russian example also illustrates how the rejection of off-line cooperation between Circassian organizations in the homeland and in the diaspora can cause difficulties—but the general process of achieving visibility and recognition can still continue. Results achieved through the increasingly public sphere of the Internet are also a way of increasing the overall visibility of the Circassian Question.

A conference on the so-called Circassian genocide was held in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi in April 2010 and resulted in an address to the Georgian Parliament, encouraging them to formally recognize the Circassian exile as an act of genocide.<sup>181</sup> Only a few Circassian diaspora organizations participated in the conference and none of the Turkish organizations wished to formally participate,—a few participated on an individual level. This was an attempt by Georgian actors to include the Circassian diaspora in the geopolitical aftermath of the war with Russia in 2008 and the subsequent Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. One response came a month later when a large-scale Circassian diaspora conference in Jordan was canceled due to pressure from Russia. This is another example of how the creation of an expanded space for action in one spot can quickly lead to reduced space in another.

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<sup>180</sup> [windowoneurasia.blogspot.com](http://windowoneurasia.blogspot.com) (23-06-2010).

<sup>181</sup> “Hidden Nations, Enduring Crimes” ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010\\_Circassian\\_Genocide\\_conference\\_in\\_Tbilisi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Circassian_Genocide_conference_in_Tbilisi)).

## Conclusion

It is important to note that—in spite of the self-positioning as either cultural or political—the combined field of Circassian organizations in Turkey has undergone a significant politicization since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The successful institutionalization of May 21st as a nationwide (and worldwide) Memorial Day is probably the best example.

This is in line with experiences from processes of diaspora-making in other parts of the world—though the process of diaspora-making among the Circassians has unfolded gradually and relatively cautiously due to the specific limitations of civil society in Turkey. The polarization of recent years is a relatively new phenomenon for many among the Circassian diaspora. Like many other minority groups in Turkey, they are experiencing a democratization of civil society as well as of the wider public sphere, in which new types of positioning and political action can now take place. For many members of the Circassian diaspora this is a confusing situation, which potentially challenges their understanding of identity and brings new lines of division and conflicts—also among the Circassian organizations. Yet, this politicization and polarization generally represent the development of an increased Circassian space for action within the Turkish civil society sector and can also be considered as a new division of labor among the Circassian organizations—hence reflecting the development of a new kind of diversity in Turkish society. This space for action represents a new type of alternative space, where Circassian identity is discussed and negotiated in a new manner, where the Internet plays a key role. This has proven to be not just a space for the development of an increasing consciousness as Circassian but also an increased mobilization that has doubled the number of Circassian activists many times—which represents a new type of civil society agency. Moreover, the strongly increased transnational element represents an alternative compared to before—and has already managed to set a new transnational agenda vis-à-vis the Russian Federation. In this way this alternative space constitute a new type of space, which illustrate another type reconfiguration in relation to the options for minority groups, indigenous people etc. that the continued process of globalization can bring.

The formation of an alternative Circassian space takes place in a phase of ongoing democratic changes in Turkey. The democratic reforms have functioned as a platform for a new type of rights-based mobilization among Circassians, with many organizations actively taking part in the process of redefining the understanding of Circassians as an ethnic minority. This includes a reassessment of the role of Circassians in the history of Turkey, which can also contribute to making the Circassians more visible. The impending loss of the Circassian language, in particular, and a more general fear of assimilation, has proved a strong mobilizing factor—particularly in the big urban areas such as Istanbul and Ankara, where most of the key organizations are located. Reproduction and reassessment of Circassian history and identity play a key role among the organization's priorities, and this links to my second point on the role of the postcolonial aspect. The more recent shift among some of the new organizations from focussing primarily on internal information and enlightenment targeting the members of the Circassian diaspora to targeting external actors, including Circassians in other countries and the Russian authorities, illustrates this postcolonial aspect. This type of lobbying and policy-oriented activity has similarities with rights-based organizations promoting postcolonial change in other parts of the world and also illustrates the slow but increasingly transnational orientation of the Circassian diaspora organizations. This kind of politicization is also in line with general processes of diaspora-making as described earlier and this strengthened transnational cooperation represents a tendency toward increased strategic awareness and collaboration among the Circassian diaspora organizations.

Large cities such as Istanbul and Ankara are examples of the role that late-modern global localities can assume as so-called frontier zones—in Saskia Sassen's understanding of the term—where democratic transition and postcolonial resistance take place simultaneously. This type of frontier zone functions as a space for action, in which the urban location plays an important role—supplemented and supported by participation in transnational networks in which the Internet often plays a facilitating role. The increased geographical dispersion of Circassians through secondary or tertiary migrations to large urban entities has in this way enabled the development of renewed civil society mobilization and organizational development. In other words, frontier zones, with their transnational links, can enable the unification of geographically dispersed peoples and localities—and not just in a virtual understanding. They also constitute alternative spaces within which the Circassian can operate.

The fact that the so-called Circassian Question is increasingly surfacing on the agenda of the Russian public sphere—whether virtual or nonvirtual—is testament to the increasing role of the Internet. Circassian individuals and organizations from the diaspora have increasingly utilized this and have gradually achieved assistance—whether directly or indirectly—from civil society organizations in Russia promoting, for instance, environmental protection, human rights, freedom of speech, and so on. This appears to be a new type of virtual public sphere, where issues suppressed within a nonvirtual civil society can achieve prominence through use of the Internet. The space for action among individual Circassians appears to be much wider in the virtual public sphere in Russia than is the case for civil society organizations—virtually or nonvirtually. The case of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi is increasingly playing the role of a lever in these processes.

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## **Part III**

### **From Contested Territory to Deterritorialisation to Virtual Reterritorialisation**

## *Chapter 4*

### **Contested Circassian Territory: The Nineteenth Century Context**

Circassia and the Circassians were generally well-known in Europe and beyond before the nineteenth century, especially the reputation of Circassian men as warriors and Circassian women as favourites of the Ottoman harems. Circassian women became a popular theme for visiting painters from Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>182</sup> In 1733 Voltaire wrote about the folk medicine of the Circassians, which long had been known in, for instance, Constantinople (Istanbul). For long periods during the Middle Ages, Circassian warriors formed the dominant group among the Mamluks, and trained warriors from the Circassian nobility regularly spent long periods in the Ottoman army before returning to the Caucasus. The Circassians also had different forms of contact towards the north and regularly interacted with free Cossack groupings before these were included as frontier troops in the Russian imperial expansion southward and eastward during the eighteenth century.<sup>183</sup> To the northwest, the Circassians had regular contact with the Crimean Tatars, including occasional wars.<sup>184</sup> When the German scientist Friedrich Blumenbach in 1795 chose to classify ‘Europeans’ or the ‘white race’ as ‘Caucasian’ or

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<sup>182</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, Circassian women became popular at exhibitions in Europe and North America ([chnm.gmu.edu/lostmuseum/serchlm.php?function=find&exhibit=star&browse=star](http://chnm.gmu.edu/lostmuseum/serchlm.php?function=find&exhibit=star&browse=star)). As a by-product, soaps, lotions and hair dyes were named ‘Circassian’ - a trend also referred to as ‘Circassophilia’ ([geocurrents.info/tag/circassophilia](http://geocurrents.info/tag/circassophilia)). Naming ships ‘Circassia’ was another trend of the mid-nineteenth century that lasted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This has become visible on the Internet with the digitalisation and publication of passenger lists. In 1900, Circassians were exhibited at Tivoli, in Copenhagen (Andreassen and Henningsen 2011).

<sup>183</sup> There had been different forms of contact and interaction between Circassians and Cossacks during the centuries leading up to the late eighteenth century, when Cossacks became an organised part of the southern expansion of the Russian Empire. Cossack groups also drew cultural inspiration from Circassian costumes, weapons and dances. This has resulted in the term ‘Circassian Cossacks’ used with different meanings.

<sup>184</sup> On the widespread fame of the Circassians in the nineteenth century, Charles King has noted the following: “It is no exaggeration to say that, for several decades in the middle of the nineteenth century, “Circassian” became a household word in many parts of Europe and North America. Correspondents from major newspapers found their way to Circassia or gleaned information from foreign consuls and merchants in Trebizond and Constantinople” (King 2010, 93).

‘Caucasoid’, it was based on both the science of skull measurement and on the fabled beauty of Caucasians (in particular Georgians and Circassians).<sup>185</sup>

From the end of the eighteenth century on, the Russian desire to push southwards for control and, finally, colonisation of the Caucasian isthmus became obvious. After achieving control over most of South Caucasus around the turn of the century, it took Russia more than fifty years to achieve military victory over the two North Caucasian territories of Circassia to the west and Chechnya/Avaristan/Lezgistan (the latter two today mostly located Dagestan) to the east. The fierce resistance of the mountaineers, the extreme violence and lengthiness of these wars in the North Caucasus are important issues when assessing the tragic outcome for the Circassians in 1864.

The famous Russian general, Aleksey Yermolov, was in charge of the war in the Caucasus from the late 1810s and his stated goal was to subdue the mountain peoples through violence, fear, intimidation and, for some, forced relocation if they were not willing to surrender to the Russian Tsar (Khodarkovsky 2011, 69). This type of war, and subsequent subjugation, can be characterised as a form of ‘settler colonialism’, as most mountain villages and fields were burned to the ground - by both parties - although, since, large parts have been left to become forests.<sup>186</sup> Simultaneously, the Caucasus and its mountain peoples entered into the Russian literature of writers such as Pushkin, Lermontov and Tolstoy - the Golden Age of Russian literature - where a more romantic representation of the mountaineers as noble warriors and oriental beauties (m/f) unfolded. This dichotomy between extermination and romanticisation marked the Russian relationship with the Circassians from the beginning - and was supplemented by another geopolitical dichotomy that partly reflected the former: the competition between Russia, on the one side, and Great Britain and its allies, such as Ottoman Turkey, on the other, for influence over the future of Circassia. All of this resulted in a slow and contested colonisation of Circassia and the Circassians into Russia, and this is reflected in the ongoing Circassian revival - not least as it has unfolded on the Internet since the mid-2000s.

In Russia, the wars against the Circassians are seen as part of the Caucasian Wars 1817-1864, as was also the case in the Soviet period, while during the ongoing mobilisation the Circassians have agreed to refer to the Russian-Circassian War 1763-1864. For analytical purposes, I have chosen to split this into three periods of ‘Circassian Mobilisation’: 1763-1829 (CM1), 1829-1853 (CM2) and

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<sup>185</sup> The Eurocentric categorisation of Blumenbachs became widely accepted and used also in English from the early nineteenth century. According to this classification ‘Caucasian’ were regarded as the most civilised race. In the 20th century ‘Caucasian’ became a formal category in the United States.

<sup>186</sup> Partly (and with some delay) because only some of the land was taken over by Cossacks immediately and because in many cases it was not until the end of the century that significant settler colonialism took place, for instance, in the Sochi area.

1853-1864 (CM3). In the following the main themes and events necessary to understand the contested character of the pre-1864 institutionalisation of Circassianness, some of which will be further discussed in Chapter 5, will be presented: the role of the Imperial Russian Army in the Caucasus; the literary invention of the Caucasus; geopolitical competition; colonisation and Russification; the development of academic Caucasiology, and the creation of Russian space in the Caucasus and local counter-versions. This will, concludingly, be supplemented by a short section on the continued institutionalisation of Circasssianness after 1864 and during the Soviet period.

### **The Imperial Russian Army in the North Caucasus**

Russian officers actively involved in the colonisation of Circassia during the nineteenth century have gained a key role in the ongoing Circassian revival whereby many of the deeds that made them heroes of the colonial conquest and imperial expansion are today used by the Circassians in a ‘reversal’ of this narrative.<sup>187</sup> This role of officers in the Russian army (who were not necessarily ethnic Russians) was partly due to the ongoing modernisation of the Russian Empire at the time, which included a strong need for systematised information, resulting in a high number of reports on the peoples and territories of the North Caucasus including mapping of both geography and ethnography. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, these tasks were mainly performed within the Russian army but, by mid-century, many of them had been transformed into civilian institutions that were often located in Tiflis (Tbilisi). Today, Circassian historians and other actors in Russia are still not allowed full access to all imperial archives, although much information has been retrieved from the archives over the years anyway, as can be seen from the many of pages documental material attached to the Circassian appeal for formal recognition of the genocide sent to the Russian parliament in 2005 and in the archive material from the nineteenth century recently made available in Georgia.<sup>188</sup> Another key source to the period are the memoirs of officers participating in the Caucasian Wars, often written and published long after the end of the war.

In this section, the Russian General Aleksey Yermolov, and his role in the war against the Circassians will be presented as an example of the role played by key Russian officers in general, and more particularly because he established a system that prevailed for many years after.

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<sup>187</sup> Apart from some of the sources mentioned in this section, an example can be found in the NoSochi2014.com/campaign, exemplifying the use of Russian generals (and Tsars as their commanders) in relation to a contemporary Circassian campaign.

<sup>188</sup> Much of this material has been collected over a period of many years, and has since been analysed and digitalised (circassiangenocide.info). The latest book is by Walter Richmond (2013).

Yermolov was already one of the most famous army generals in Russia through his involvement in the Napoleonic War, when he was placed in charge of the war in the Caucasus from 1816 and subsequently throughout most of the 1820s. On this task, he quickly stated that his most important role was “to create fear at the Caucasian frontier” (Jaimoukha 2001, 63). Later, his approach was referred to by Russian historians as “the Yermolov system” (Gammer 2003, 184; Baddeley 1908, 132): “Yermolov was the first of the Russian generals to practise the *razzia*, or raid; he obtained the system from the Cossacks, who learned it themselves from their constant skirmishes with the tribes” (Blanch 1960/1978, 102). The Yermolov system was a new and systematic approach (by a modern empire and its well-armed and large army) and was aimed at entire ethnic groups in the North Caucasus (including the Circassians). This is part of the reason why Circassian organisations and activists today refer to this as an act of genocide.

As Yermolov stated at the time in a letter to Tsar Alexander I: “I desire that the terror of my name should guard our frontiers more potently than chains or fortresses, that my word should be for the natives a law more inevitable than death” (Gammer 2003, 185; Blanch 1978, 24). Gammer further notes that xenophobia was a central idea of Yermolov’s: “The whole of the Caucasus must, and should become an integral part of the Russian Empire; that the existence of independent or semi-independent states or communities of any description, whether Christian, Musulman, or Pagan, in the mountains or in the plains, was incompatible with the dignity and honour of his master, the safety and welfare of this subjects” (Baddeley 1907, 35 quoted from Gammer 2003, 185). Gammer further notes that Yermolov “set himself the aim of destroying any non-Russian nationality in the country” (Esadze 1907, 35; quoted from Gammer). The longevity of the Yermolov myth in Russia over the last almost two hundred years was enhanced by the Russian author Alexander Pushkin in his famous poem ‘The Caucasian Prisoner’, which included the following line: “Humble thyself O Caucasus, for Yermolov is coming” (Blanch 1978, 24).<sup>189</sup>

Yermolov became famous for his contempt towards “the Asiatics” or what have since been referred to as the Oriental Other. He believed that “the “Asiatics” were guided by different moral standards in which notions of truth and honour need not apply. Still, assessing the methods of Yermolov as well as the fact that he took on three wives while in the Caucasus, Michael Khodarkovsky concludes: “It turns out that the famous Russian general, revered as “a hero of the Caucasus,” was also an Oriental satrap” (Khodarkovsky 2011, 69). General Yermolov became the embodiment of Russian imperial power in the Caucasus as his “gigantic stature, roaring voice was the personification of... mythical heroes of Russian legend”, which contributed to the establishment of a

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<sup>189</sup> Alternatively translated as: “Submit and bow your snowy head, Oh Caucasus, Yermolov marches” (Leyton 1994, 54).

popular myth in Russia that is today still alive and revered.<sup>190</sup> “The Titan figure who dominated the Caucasus scene” from 1816 became for the local Caucasians “the Moscow Shaitan - the Moscovy Devil” (Blanch 1960/1978, 23). On the role of Yermolov in the Caucasus and the “enormous harm” of his methods, Blanch stresses that they “were directly responsible for the revival of Muridism and the fanatic antagonism of Daghestan and the Tchetchen provinces” and that it also contributed to pushing many of the remaining Kabardians into the Western parts of Circassia to join their resistance against the Russian army (Blanch 1978, 26).

Regarding the reputation of Yermolovs after his time in the Caucasus ended in 1827, Moshe Gammer has noted: “His period as ‘Proconsul of the Caucasus’ had acquired the proportions of a ‘golden age’ in the collective memory of Russia” (Gammer 2003, 182). A tradition of presenting Yermolov as a hero in much Russian history writing continued into the Soviet period and after, as illustrated in a book published in 2001.<sup>191</sup> Gammer ascribes the mythology surrounding Yermolov to the fact that “history is written by the victors” and he stresses the need for historians to re-examine the history written on Yermolov as there is a need to “clean” it of “historical PR” (Gammer 2003, 188).<sup>192</sup> As such, the conclusions of Gammer and others are in line with the contemporary protests of a number of Caucasians actors, who call for a reassessment of the nineteenth century heritage of the documented actions of Russian generals in the Caucasus, which are still praised among Cossacks and others in the districts of Krasnodar and Stavropol.<sup>193</sup> All in all, according to Gammer, the heritage of Yermolov was punitive expeditions, destruction of native villages, hanging of hostages, killing of women and children, selling of captives as slaves, stealing of entire herds of cattle and horses etc. Gammer states that “even by the standards of those times...Yermolov’s brutality was excessive” (Gammer 2003, 186).<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Especially in the Cossack-dominated areas of Krasnodar and Stavropol bordering the North Caucasus, statues of Yermolov are found and are used in memorialisation events, which many Circassian activists and organisations have regularly protested against.

<sup>191</sup> Gammer refers to a book by A. V. Shishkov about the generals of the Caucasian Wars published in Moscow in 2001 (Gammer 2003, 183).

<sup>192</sup> Gammer further notes that the necessary revision of Russian history writing on the heritage of Yermolov is also needed due to the fact that his actual results were limited, referring to the fact that it still took several decades to conquer these lands.

<sup>193</sup> As seen in the names of towns and in monuments that are often used for annual gatherings.

<sup>194</sup> Gammer notes that it is no wonder that Yermolov has to this very day remained a satanic figure to Chechens, and to Dagestanis as well (Gammer 2003, 186). In the Circassian parts, it was particularly the easternmost provinces of Kabarda and the Kabardian villages that were increasingly exposed to the Yermolov system (Natho 2009, 277). As the Circassian author Kadir I. Natho states: “As R. U. Tuganov has justly noted this was one of the most disgraceful pages in the history of the colonial policy of Czarist Russia in the Caucasus.” According to Natho, the devastation “almost totally demoralised Kabarda”. The history of the many battles against the Kabardians is among the many examples that question the enforced celebrations of 450 years of Circassian-Russian voluntary unity lavishly celebrated by Russia in 2007. According to the Circassian author, Amjad Jaimoukha, the total number of Kabardians had decreased from 350,000 to just 50,000 by 1818, after four decades of war and punitive actions by the Russian army, supplemented by severe epidemics (Jaimoukha 2001, 63).

The strategy of the Russian army towards the conquest of the North Caucasus, as hinted at by Yermolov in the above-mentioned quote, consisted of the building of a line of fortifications including settlements for Cossacks. This strategy was initially begun in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century but gathered speed with the arrival of Yermolov. A crucial part of this strategy was to divide the North Caucasus into two parts by another line of forts, from north to south along a middle axis, down the Military Highway from Vladikavkaz in the north to the city of Tiflis (Tbilisi) south of the Caucasus mountain range, which had been incorporated into the empire in 1801 (Khodarkovsky 2011, 21). From 1829 on, Circassia and the Circassians came under renewed Russian pressure as a result of the Adrianople Treaty, which transferred control over the Circassian Black Sea coast from the Ottoman Empire to Russia. Neither Circassia nor the Circassians were mentioned in the treaty and the Circassians protested at this as, in fact, only a few Ottoman trading posts were to be found along this coastline, apart from the late eighteenth century, beyond the fortress in Anapa that Russia had conquered during the war in 1828-29. As the Russian officer Fyodor Tornau later noted, “The Sultan’s concession was completely incomprehensible to the mountaineers” (Richmond, 2013, 34). The result was that Russia could now finalise its encirclement of Circassia as a blockade of the Circassian coast which, together with the establishment of new coastal fortresses, was aimed at preventing Circassian trade with traders from Ottoman Turkey (and beyond). This was especially done in order to weaken the Circassian resistance militarily, by preventing the supply of gunpowder and, physically, by preventing the sale of salt, which was crucial for health in Circassia.

As stated by Charles King, the brutal methods employed by Yermolov in the Caucasus set an example to be followed “by tsarists, Bolsheviks, and Russian generals into the twenty-first century” (King 2010, 45). Among the many Russian generals succeeding Yermolov, many became well-known due to the prolonged fighting in the Caucasus that was gradually more covered by the media in Russia and in Europe, where new public spheres and public opinion increasingly began to influence politics. The acts of many of the officers during the wars in the Caucasus are today questioned by Circassian civil society organisations, writers and others as part of their counter-memorialisation efforts. General Zass, in particular, should be noted as the one who reshaped and perfected Yermolov’s methods as a “worthy pupil” (Natho 2009, 358) or simply a “typical disciple of Yermolov” (Khodarkovsky, 2011, 101). Zass had adorned the fence around his house with the skulls of dead Circassians and, furthermore, kept such skulls under his bed (which, according to visitors, smelled horrible), in order to send to scientist-friends in Berlin (Zhemoukhov 2011).<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> General Veliaminov, commander of the Caucasus 1831-38, also collected the heads of mountaineer peoples, “which he sent to the Department of Anthropology of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg for study” (Richmond 2008, 79). Richmond further notes: “Veliaminov certainly treated the mountaineers as little more than animals”. Veliaminov had read parts of Khan-Girei’s manuscript on Circassia.

Circassian activists have launched a campaign for the return and formal burial of these skulls.<sup>196</sup> The generals Zass, in the 1830s, and Yevdokimov, in the 1860s, are seen within the contemporary Circassian revival as the ones who most vigorously pursued the Yermolov system to its extreme.<sup>197</sup> More on Yevdokimov below. Commander-in-chief and viceroy of the Caucasus, Mikhail Vorontsov (1844-1856), also played an important role, as will be discussed below. The changing Russian emperors, as the supreme commanders of the Russian army, should also be mentioned - for instance, Emperor Alexander II, who stated that Russia needed the fertile lands of the Circassians for agriculture and Cossack settlements.

Other Russian officers that play a key role in today's Circassian revival are, to name but a few: Lazarev, Tornau, Miliutin and Yevdokimov, all of whom in different ways ended up perpetuating the Yermolov system.<sup>198</sup> Admiral Lazarev is a celebrated figure in Russia and seen in the name of the town Lazarevskoye, which today forms part of the Black Sea Riviera of Sochi.<sup>199</sup> According to Yoav Karny, "Admiral Lazarev belonged to the gallery of empire builders - those whose military genius was matched by their ability to excite the imperial nation's imagination and whet the appetite for further conquests. He was an ardent follower of Catherine the Great's ultimate imperialist dictum, 'The border is not finished'." (Karny 2000, 7). In the contemporary Circassian revival, however, the name of Lazarev is repeatedly mentioned to symbolise repression and killings of the native population.<sup>200</sup> In 1996, a bust of Lazarev was re-erected at the town's train station (in honour of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian Black Sea fleet). His nose was cut off by Circassian activists though (Karny 2000, 9).<sup>201</sup>

<sup>196</sup> [www.causes.com/causes/481153-help-repatriate-circassian-relics-skulls-bones-from-museums-collected-by-general-zass-and-others](http://www.causes.com/causes/481153-help-repatriate-circassian-relics-skulls-bones-from-museums-collected-by-general-zass-and-others). A nineteenth century drawing showing the house of Zass set on top of a small hill with a fence with Circassian skulls on top of high poles has been widely circulated on the Internet and has become one of the visual icons of the Circassian revival.

<sup>197</sup> See Chapter 5 on the role of Genocide Recognition in the Circassian revival.

<sup>198</sup> Another Russian general of importance was Alexei Veliaminov, commander of the Caucasus 1831-8 (Richmond 2008, 63). In May 1837, the Tsar instructed Khan-Girei to go on a mission to the Circassians, which, according to Richmond, "was essentially a demand for unconditional surrender", though both the Tsar and Veliaminov knew that this would not be accepted (Richmond 2008, 64). Khan-Girei was sent as a messenger with a proposal that would place the Circassian in a catch 22 situation. The historian Yakov Gordin has noted: "For [Veliaminov], a student of the Encyclopedists and to some degree Montesquieu, the mountaineers' way of life and their very worldview were in essence illegal and irrational. It was necessary either to exterminate them or force them to live correctly" (Richmond 2008, 79).

<sup>199</sup> Lazarev is famous in Russia as one of the first to explore Antarctica and he circumnavigated the world several times.

<sup>200</sup> The Shapsug National District Area was established in 1925; in 1945, it was abolished and renamed Lazarevskoye. Walter Richmond has noted the following on renaming during the Soviet period: "This was only the most visible example of the Soviet practice of replacing Circassian toponyms with appellations honoring Russian participants in the Caucasus Wars. For example, the settlement of Psezuapse was renamed Arkhipo-Osipovko in honor of a Russian soldier who blew himself up along with a group of Circassians"..."The process of elimination of Circassian toponyms added to the feeling of cultural disenfranchisement and resentment towards the Soviet government." (Richmond 2008, 128). More on the role of naming below.

<sup>201</sup> Head of Shapsug Adyge Khase in Lazarevskoye, Majeed Chechukh, on Admiral Lazarev, the attacks and landings in the region, "Under his watch, dozens of villages were wiped off the earth" - including the village located where



Feodor Tornau is another example of a Russian officer who has today become visible within the ongoing Circassian revival, as well as in the western Caucasus in general. He travelled extensively in Circassia in the second half of the 1830s disguised as a Circassian but ended up in Circassian captivity for a long period. To find and liberate him became a top priority for the Tsar as well as the army in the Caucasus at the time.<sup>202</sup> According to Khodarkovsky, the ‘Tornau affair’ “became one of the episodes in the geopolitical struggle among the Russian, Ottoman, and British Empires, better known as the Great Game” (Khodarkovsky 2011, 118).<sup>203</sup> Tornau was freed in November 1838. Decades later, Tornau wrote in his memoirs, published in 1864, about his experiences during the war in the Caucasus: “What is this all for? Is there not enough room on earth for all, regardless of their tongue and faith?” as a comment after a violently bloody attack on a Chechen mountain village in the eastern parts of North Caucasus in 1832 - the same tactics that were used against the Circassians in the western parts (Khodarkovsky 2011, 95). Tornau’s descriptions of Circassia and the Circassians were first published in the 1850s in Tiflis, in the journal *Kavkaz* (Caucasus).<sup>204</sup> In the words of Khodarkovsky, Tornau’s memoirs represent a “wealth of geographic and ethnographic information” and are as such a part of the documentation efforts being carried out by various Circassian actors today.

General Dmitrii Miliutin, who would later become Minister of War in St. Petersburg, in 1857 reformulated the army’s approach to the Circassians. Instead of the resettlement of Circassians and subsequent settlement of farmers, “eliminating the Circassian was to be an end in itself - to cleanse the land of hostile elements” (King 2008, 94). According to this plan, the Circassians that chose to remain in Russia had to be moved out of the Caucasus.<sup>205</sup>

General Yevdokimov was the last in a long line of Russian army generals during this period, and was the commander of the Russian army that secured the final victory in the war in 1864. But, among Circassians and others, he came to symbolise what have been called ‘genocidal methods’, ‘pogroms’ or ‘ethnic cleansing’, and as such in line with the system defined by General Yermolov

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Lazarevskoye lies today (Karny 2000, 11). ”He was the man who destroyed our nation, who committed genocide unprecedented in history” (Karny 2000, 9).

<sup>202</sup> One of the most prominent Circassians of the period, Khan-Girei, was given this task but was not able to locate and free Tornau. Subsequently, the writings of both Khan-Girei and Tornau became part of the mid-nineteenth century literary canon on Circassia and the Circassians, and have been republished repeatedly since.

<sup>203</sup> Several British actors visited Circassia in this period; more on this later.

<sup>204</sup> Tiflis (Tbilisi) was the regional centre of the Russian imperial administration in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century. In 2010, the Sochi department of the Russian Geographical Society republished a small book by the Abkhazian historian G. A. Dzidzariya from 1976 in celebration of the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tornau’s stay in what is today the wider Sochi area (Dzidzariya 2010, 144).

<sup>205</sup> “In his memoirs, Miliutin, who proposed deporting the Circassians from the mountains as early as 1857, recalls “the plan of action decided upon for 1860 was to cleanse [ochistit’] the mountain zone of its indigenous population”” (Richmond 2008, 79).

as well as the orders of different Tsars.<sup>206</sup> ‘From Yermolov to Yevdokimov’ could be one way of framing the war in the region which, in Russia, is referred to as the Caucasian Wars of 1817 to 1864.<sup>207</sup> Today, Circassian actors have chosen to rename the war the Russian-Circassian War and to re-periodise it from 1763 to 1864 in order to include Kabarda and the Kabardians in the narrative. The inclusion of Kabarda - the eastern part of Circassia - is also a way of challenging the Russian narrative of the ‘voluntary’ inclusion of the Circassians into the Russian Empire, a widespread claim which is mainly upheld through reference to the Circassian princess that Tsar Ivan the Terrible married in 1557. Today, the above-mentioned army personalities, together with the responsible Tsars, constitute key elements of the Circassian narrative - which to a large extent also could be labelled a counter-narrative - on the wars and subsequent forced displacements of the nineteenth century, and which is at the heart of the contemporary Circassian revival. These are examples of the ‘competing memorialisation’ in the north-western Caucasian space in the present post-imperial phase.<sup>208</sup>

Voices of opposition could also be found within the Russian Army as illustrated in the following statement made in 1841 by General Nikolai Raevskii, who fought against the Circassians at the Black Sea in the 1830s, taken from a letter to the Minister of War in St. Petersburg: ““Our activities in the Caucasus are reminiscent of the many tragedies of the early conquest of America by the Spaniards,” and he expressed the hope that the experience would not leave a similar “bloody legacy” for Russian history” (Jersild 2002, 73). These kinds of letter, together with for instance the memoirs of officers who served in the Caucasus, today form part of investigations into the period that are contributing to a rewriting of the history of the war(s).<sup>209</sup>

The prominent Circassians of the period, Sultan Khan-Girei and Shora Nogmov, both also served as officers in the Circassian Corps in Saint Petersburg. Both wrote books on Circassian history and identity, which have been republished and analysed during the last twenty years. They are today regarded as the founders of modern Circassian literature. During the period of their military service, both argued for a softer Russian line towards the colonisation of the Circassian lands.

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<sup>206</sup> Much of the documentation of events during the final years of the war comes from army reports in imperial archives, and from books and memoirs published by former members of the Russian army campaign, often many years after the wars.

<sup>207</sup> The Circassian author Natho (2009, 359), notes: “The principal ‘ideologist’ of this genocide, Count Evdokimov, has clearly stated the aim and ‘strategy’ of the forcible eviction of the Circassians from their historical homeland”.

<sup>208</sup> The thaw of the Gorbachev and Yeltsin periods has, in many ways, been reversed. This is illustrated by the increase in formal support to Cossack groups, which have significant influence in today’s Kuban region (formally Krasnodar Krai), where the mentioned Russian army officers of the nineteenth century are regularly celebrated.

<sup>209</sup> Natho (2009, 359) on Russian officers as eyewitnesses: Veniukov and colonel Sharap (on general Babich) and Vishnevetski (also on Babich).

Historians and other experts still discuss whether the forced expulsion of the Circassians from their historical homeland was the result of conscious decisions by key decision makers in Russia. The fact remains that a new demographic policy evolved as an extension of the Yermolov system and became an imperial population policy in an imperial border zone between Russia and the Ottoman Empire during a period of extreme geopolitical competition between empires. Empires that simultaneously increasingly were affected by nationalistic trends such as manifested in policies of Russification. Whether these population policies established a precedent for future expulsions of Armenians (1915), Chechens (1944) etc. is difficult to establish but there is no doubt that many of the peoples of the Caucasus have paid a high price for their location between empires. This is, in many ways, similar to what Timothy Snyder has called the Bloodlands in reference to the lands between the Soviet and the German empires in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>210</sup>

Furthermore, according to Austin Jersild, “many regime officials and other Russians in the Caucasus and throughout Russia quite simply believed that the Adygei and the mountaineers in general did not belong in the empire” (Jersild 2002, 25). Dana Sherry notes that the resettlement policies could be traced back to “European and Russian notions of governance” and further discusses whether the forced relocation of the Circassians was the result of an expulsion or emigration (Sherry 2009, 15). Sherry refers to Peter Holquist, who claims that the colonial Russian administrators were simply inspired by European ideas of ethnic homogeneity and refers to “the western Caucasus as one of the first places where officials attempted to create a homogenous population on a mass scale” (Sherry 2009, 15). “I argue that the existing scholarship on the Circassian emigration has mistaken the origins and goals of the movement and that the exodus should be understood as an unintended, if unsurprising, consequence of draconian Russian military practices in the region” (Sherry 2009, 16).<sup>211</sup> Several of Sherry’s relativistic conclusions are countered in the 2013 book on the Circassian genocide by Walter Richmond.

### **North Caucasus in Russian Literature - Pushkin Discovered the Caucasus**

After spending a period as an officer in the Russian army in the North Caucasus, the famous Russian writer Alexander Pushkin wrote and published the celebrated poem ‘The Prisoner of the Caucasus’ in 1822.<sup>212</sup> This marked the beginning of a Caucasian trend among writers of the so-

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<sup>210</sup> More on this in the Chapter 8 on Circassian Genocide Recognition.

<sup>211</sup> Sherry discusses the role of key figures such as Miliutin, Fadeev and Evdokimov in to the planning and executing the forced exile (Sherry 2009, 15). Fadeev fantasised about how the mountaineers’ surroundings could potentially result in the creation of a new kind of Russian, styled after the Caucasian Mountaineer: the Russian Mountaineer, well-trained and with a strong character.

<sup>212</sup> Prisoners in the Caucasus became a often repeated theme in the later novels and other stories on the North Caucasus - both in ‘high literature’, such as Tolstoy’s ‘A Prisoner in the Caucasus’ (1870), and in vernacular literature.

called Golden Age of Russian literature, with canonised writers such as also Mihail Lermontov and Lev Tolstoy also spending time as officers at the Caucasian military frontier. This had, in 1844, already made another significant Russian writer and critic - Vissarion Belinsky - state that '*Pushkin discovered the Caucasus*' (Leyton 1994, 16). According to Susan Leyton, it is primarily thanks to Pushkin's "romantic literature's alpine Caucasus and Muslim mountaineers" that the region, and especially the North Caucasus, - of all the many ethnic groups and regions in the vast empire - generated the greatest interest (Blanch 1960/1978, 192).<sup>213</sup> This was primarily by representing the landscape and the population in a manner that made them 'fit' the Russian national as well as imperial needs. Belinsky noted that it was not simply the literary qualities of the poem that made it so popular but also its ethnographic and geographic content, presenting new and exotic peoples and landscapes thus far unknown to the public at large (Leyton 1994, 16). This is further emphasised by Leyton's analysis of the poem and its use in the following two decades in Russia, where she concludes that Pushkin began the production of the Caucasus as 'imaginary geography', which later spread - eventually also beyond the borders of Russia.

Circassia and the Circassians - together with other sub-regions and peoples of the region - became well-known, reproduced and included in a wider Imperial Russian discourse, in which the nature was celebrated as sublime and the peoples as noble savages (in need of a civilising mission).<sup>214</sup> This resulted in the North Caucasian frontier zone acquiring "a stylized character to become the 'Caucasian Alps'" (Leyton 1994, 47). But the conclusion of Pushkin's poem - as well as of most of the other writers and travellers subsequently visiting and writing about the region and its people - was that this unique territory had to yield to the inevitable sublime Russian civilisation and imperial power. According to Halbach, the image of the mountaineers of the North Caucasus of that period in Russia was that they were destined to eternal wildness (Halbach 1991, 59).

Natural scientists and historians also visited and wrote more academic works about the peoples and the nature of the region but, compared to the strong impact of the romantic representations, this largely went unnoticed. According to Leyton: "By rendering the Caucasus as the Alps of the homeland's own periphery, Pushkin invented a soul-stirring realm of the sublime, full of perils for citified travellers but ready to inspire and rejuvenate them. The territory was thus appropriated as a space for the therapeutic uses of the lyrical Russian self unhampered by native peoples. Thrilling nuances of Asiatic tribal menace certainly enlarged the Caucasian poetics of space, already laden with natural dangers like precipices, violent storms and avalanches, but local populations were not permitted to hinder Russian communion with alpine wilderness" (Leyton 1994, 52).

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<sup>213</sup> Lesley Blanch states that Lermontov, more than the others, established the Caucasian Landscape as the Russian imagination - which is a primarily an academic discussion. Blanch refers to Lermontov as "the personification of Russia in the Caucasus".

<sup>214</sup> Pushkin was inspired by Byron.

Although the region and its nature are often described and celebrated as uninhabited and almost empty of local population over this period, it gradually became clear to the Russian readers that the region was also an “oriental combat zone” (Leyton 1994, 53). Still, Russian writers at large managed to erect “a screen to the inhumanity” of the military Russian imperial colonialism in the region.

By mid-century, Tolstoy was attempting a more realistic approach to storytelling from the Caucasus, but the romantic versions of Pushkin and Marlinsky managed to gain dominance in the popular literature of the second half of the nineteenth century. Here, the romanticised mythologies and stereotype of the Circassian warrior and the Circassian beauty (or, sometimes, the more generalised: Mountaineer Peoples or Gortzy)<sup>215</sup> enjoyed a revival as a Russian-Caucasian version of the Cowboy-and-Indians novels of the American Wild West.

### **Geopolitical Competition: The Great Game and the British Discovery of Circassia**

The nineteenth century geopolitical competition between the two large empires of Russia and Great Britain is of key importance to understanding the final fate of Circassia and the Circassians. Britain feared that further Russian territorial consolidation in the Caucasus might pave the way for new Russian imperial ambitions whereby Russia could, on the one hand, conquer the steadily weakening Turkey and thus challenge the dominant role of the British Empire on the world scene. This might also constitute a threat to India, the Jewel in the Crown.<sup>216</sup> The British interest in Circassia was increased after the Adrianople Treaty in 1829 passed control over the Circassian Black Sea coast from Ottoman Empire to Russia, which in many ways marked the beginning of the famous Great Game - as the geopolitical competition between the two empires for influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia was later labelled.<sup>217</sup> The competition was sharpened and actualised by the steadily

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<sup>215</sup> Tolstoy opted for an even older tradition in Russia by referring to the North Caucasian native peoples as Tatars.

<sup>216</sup> During several periods of the mid-nineteenth century, this resulted in a number of key actors - especially politicians in Britain - placing Circassia in a potentially pivotal role in world politics.

<sup>217</sup> In the nineteenth century it was still treaties - mainly post-war peace treaties - that established and recognised the independence of states in Europe and the parts of Eurasia covered by large empires such as the Russian and the Ottoman. When most empires began to dissolve and subsequently an increasing number of nation-states evolved in the twentieth century this element of international recognition was taken over by the League of Nations and particularly by the United Nations.

weakening Ottoman Empire - for centuries an (on-off) partner and ally of the Circassians.<sup>218</sup> This competition resulted in a strong wave of anti-Russian attitudes and propaganda among British politicians and the rapidly growing newspaper media, which gave the public a new insight into and potentially a new role in politics. It is in this geopolitical context that the relatively strong interest of the British media in Circassia and the Circassians should be understood.

It was primarily its geographic location in the North Caucasus, on the coast of the Black Sea that made Circassia interesting for the British. A number of official and semi-official representatives were sent to Circassia in the second half of the 1830s to assess the potential for the Circassians to halt or hinder the Russian advance in the region. These constituted a mix of civil servants, spies, former officers and merchants.<sup>219</sup> They all had a significant and lasting impact on Circassia and the Circassians. The first to come, in 1834, was David Urquhart, who promoted the creation of a unified Circassian state with a modern united army.<sup>220</sup> He became immortal for designing the first Circassian flag as a symbol of (new) national identity and unity.<sup>221</sup> The next five British visitors all wrote books about Circassia after returning home.<sup>222</sup> Several of these travellers also sent reports home to British newspapers, where the readers were able to learn about a foreign country from a group of rapporteurs sympathetic to the Circassian case.<sup>223</sup> Some of them also took part in the activities of Circassian support committees established not just in Britain but also, for instance, in Turkey and France.

Most of the Russian writers never managed to visit the Circassian heartland but described the area and the peoples as seen from the frontier fortifications of the army or from the areas of neighbouring Kabarda already included in the empire.<sup>224</sup> This is partly why Bell stated that his

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<sup>218</sup> Especially after the Turkish military defeat by Russia, as expressed in the Peace Treaty of Adrianople in 1829. This treaty was interpreted by Russia as acceptance of their annexation of the remaining parts of the Caucasus. This has been rejected by the Circassians and their supporters.

<sup>219</sup> Their actions has been labelled as 'private diplomacy' by Peter Brock (1956, 401) or even counterproductive.

<sup>220</sup> According to Longworth, Urquhart's visit was "itself an era in the destinies of Circassia" (Vol. 1, vii).

<sup>221</sup> Ottoman Turkey also supported or promoted the unification of the Circassian tribes into a modern Circassian state on several occasions. Before the Russian ambitions of conquering Circassia, the Ottoman Empire had for centuries functioned as the dominant empire in the region - mostly with friendly relations with Circassia and the Circassians.

<sup>222</sup> For instance J. A. Longworth, Edmund Spencer and James S. Bell. The interest in the Circassian cause in the West is illustrated by the fact that James S. Bell's book on his time in Circassia was published in Danish in 1844 (in two volumes).

<sup>223</sup> The tradition of these British travellers and writers was continued by a number of European writers. Most famous of these is perhaps Alexandre Dumas.

<sup>224</sup> Kabarda was the easternmost Circassian territory and large parts of Kabarda were included into Russia in the late eighteenth century.

writings, as well as those of his British colleagues of the period, constituted key eyewitness reports on “that *terra incognita* - the Caucasian world” (Bell 1840, xv).<sup>225</sup> Bell was a merchant by trade as well as a former army officer. In his own words, he was one of the first to fill the Caucasian space with content - his intention was to describe it as accurately as possible, with an emphasis on the scientific categorisation of the peoples according to linguistic and ethnic criteria etc.<sup>226</sup>

During the Crimean War (1853-1856) the Russian army left the fortifications they had managed to build since the 1830s on the Circassian coast and Circassians took control over them. British troops were in the Caucasus and Great Britain considered whether to support a rising and potential independence of Georgia, Circassia and Shamils Emirate. Once more there were popular support for the cause of the Circassians and the other Caucasians in Britain and in Western Europe in general.<sup>227</sup> The British leadership, however, ended up taking a pragmatic or realpolitik approach and left the Caucasus after Russia had been forced to leave the Balkans or the Western Black Sea. This was a potentially pivotal moment for the Circassians, who instead faced renewed attacks from the Russian army as form of revenge that resulted in a reorientation towards the eastern shores of the Black Sea after the defeat in the Crimean War (Geraci 2008, 347).<sup>228</sup>

The international fame of the Circassians and the increasing interest in Europe and beyond has been named by Martin W. Lewis as a virtual ‘Circassiophilia’ that spread from Europe to North America.<sup>229</sup> This illustrates the role of knowledge and knowledge circulation in a context of geopolitical competition where new public spheres (around the world) and new media technologies (and print capitalism) played a role in informing and mobilising the public in Britain, France, Ottoman Turkey and others. Much of this information was disregarded when Russia finally colonised the area but play a significant role in today’s Circassian revival.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> This is supported by the British journalist, Longworth, who stayed together with Bell in Circassian during one year. He refers to “the soil of Circassia as untrodden, if not forbidden, ground to the traveller” and further states that “all that has been written on the subject of this country may be summed in a few words” (Longworth 1840, vol. 1, vi).

<sup>226</sup> The geopolitical game unfolding between Russia and Britain regarding the independence of Circassia has been labelled by Edward Spencer as ‘manipulative diplomacy’ (Spencer 1837, 166). This understanding is supported and elaborated upon by Karl Marx (1853 and 1897).

<sup>227</sup> The Crimean War was widely covered by the media and this war is generally seen as the beginning of a new phase of war reporting, that increasingly also included photography. See Appendix for examples.

<sup>228</sup> The beginning of a Russian-Caucasian trend that can still be found?

<sup>229</sup> [Geocurrents.info/place/russia-ukraine-and-caucasus/the-circassian-mystique-and-its-historical-roots](http://Geocurrents.info/place/russia-ukraine-and-caucasus/the-circassian-mystique-and-its-historical-roots).

<sup>230</sup> Colonialism as a power/knowledge binary, as described by Said and others, of dominance, but also with ‘cracks’ or ‘pockets’ of knowledge that has been ‘passive’ - in a Russian context - for a long time, and which can be reactivated as part of claiming a reversing of the colonisation.

The Russian officer Fadeev, who served in the Caucasus in the 1860s, and became the main army publicist on the Caucasian Wars, has noted that the Circassian coast was of crucial importance to Russia. As stated by Fadeev, the Circassians had to be moved: “The re-education of a people is a centuries-long process, but in the pacification of the Caucasus the time had come for us, perhaps only for a brief time, to complete one of the most vital tasks in Russian history” (Colarusso 2008, 3). The connection to the solution of the Eastern Question through the final annexation of the Caucasus was part of the reason behind the 1864 celebrations, as also illustrated by the comments of a Moscow newspaper that the Eastern Question had now finally been settled in favour of Russia.<sup>231</sup>

### **The creation of a Russian oriental space in the North Caucasus**

According to Leyton: “Russians considered the Caucasus’ native cultures strictly Asian. Ever since the mid-eighteenth century, Russian map-makers had taken the Caucasian range as an outer limit of Europe” (Leyton 1994, 71). In novels and travellers’ accounts of the period, the crossing of the river Terek or the river Kuban marked a farewell to Europe - with apprehension and excitement.<sup>232</sup>

Circassia was often labelled as being located between east and west - between Europe and Asia - between the Orient and the Occident.<sup>233</sup> After centuries of being located mainly in an Asian periphery, in the nineteenth century Circassia became the periphery of both Europe and Asia. And yet, by the mid-nineteenth century, Circassia was still a geographical area not clearly defined by internationally recognised borders in a modern understanding. Both Russia and Britain - in spite of the competition - took part in an Orientalist production of Circassia as an imaginative geography (Said 1978/1995, 54). As described by Edward Said, concrete imperial ambitions of colonisation

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<sup>231</sup> These sentiments had been enhanced by the defeat in the Crimean War (1853-56). Ironically, the outcome of this war was also seen as a defeat or a setback by the Circassians and other peoples of the Caucasus. They had hoped that the temporary vulnerability of Russia would have resulted in armed support from Britain and its allies, in order to achieve internationally recognised independence from Russia.

<sup>232</sup> As stated by Dana Sherry on the introduction of the peoples of the Caucasus into the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century: “After going through a process of purification, each group would contribute to the region’s development and the imperial officials would thus oversee the transformation of the Orient into a corner of Europe” (Sherry 2007).

<sup>233</sup> As David Urquhart had already written in 1838: “That people are the door-keepers of Asia, and the champions of Europe.” Speech at a public meeting in Glasgow, May 23, 1838. ([www.ncrhi.net/flag.html](http://www.ncrhi.net/flag.html))



walk hand-in-hand with a new form of knowledge and identity production in such an Orientalist discourse. An Orientalist discourse is about the production of knowledge, difference/otherness and power (Said 1978/1995, 349). The Caucasus became imperial Russia's own 'Orient' - inspired by the other European imperial ventures in Asia (Leyton 1994, 1).<sup>234</sup> This resulted in a specific Caucasian phenomenon or contradiction: while the Circassians and the other mountaineer peoples and their territories was treated part of Russia's own Orient, in most maps (of Russia, Europe, Black Sea etc.) this area was after 1864 generally reclassified as part of European Russia.

Colonised territories characterised by oral traditions - such as Circassia - were articulated in the imperial metropolises mainly through writing. Writing, publishing and the emergence of a new reading audience - in combination with the introduction of common education - by the nineteenth century had resulted in a decisive significance for the construction of colonised spaces such as Circassia (Gregory 1994, 173).

Although the Orient is, according to Said, 'silent', voices of opposition and resistance could still be heard (Said 1978/1995, 94). The British/Western European narrative version of Circassia included a clear counter-narrative in relation to the Russian version. Within Russia, for instance, the writings of the Circassian Sultan Khan-Girei and Shora Nogmov on the language and history of the Circassians was, by mid-nineteenth century, representing a new Circassian elite partly educated in the imperial metropolis and serving in the imperial army, while still expressing a certain level of loyalty to the Circassians and local Caucasian belonging in their writings and in their deeds (Zhemukhov 2011).<sup>235</sup>

### **Academic Orientalism and Caucasology in the Russian Empire**

In general, Russian academic Orientalism (Oriental Studies) - as performed at the universities and during scientific missions - was delayed in comparison with Western Europe. In the beginning, this was largely performed by foreign experts, which serves to emphasise the potential Eurocentric and *Orientalist* character of these academic ventures. A specific Russian academic Orientalism was

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<sup>234</sup> Used as the title of the 2011 book by Vera Tolz, "Russia's Own Orient".

<sup>235</sup> Their writings were strongly censored at the time and only fully published after the fall of the Soviet Union. Today their works are canonised as icons of Circassian history.

established as a Caucasian ethnology or Caucasology from the 1820s as a military undertaking (Halbach 1991, 57). From the 1840s on, some of the results of the Caucasian ethnology began to be published and some of the new Caucasian newspapers - especially from the regional Russian administrative centre in Tiflis (Tbilisi) - quickly became interested in disseminating this new knowledge. Still, by 1864 the Russian ethnographic knowledge of the Caucasian mountaineer peoples was marked by significant shortcomings (Halbach 1991, 59).

Regarding the Russian mapping of the North Caucasus: "Modern cartographic studies of the region were begun by Russian scientists in Ciscaucasia about 1815, and some medium-scale maps were produced in 1862. Large-scale maps began to appear in 1866."<sup>236</sup> The first thorough study of the mountains was only published in 1881.<sup>237</sup>

### **Excursus: The continued institutionalisation of the territorial affinity after 1864**

After the forced exile in 1864, most of the former Circassian territory was included in the Kuban region (Oblast), with sub-districts with Russian names as part of a strategy of Russification introduced into most of the North Caucasus. The categorisation of the Circassians now left in small pockets of land continued, however, and was further institutionalised within the Russian imperial administration through, for instance, army maps, now increasingly supplemented by maps and articles in encyclopaedias and other types of public as well as scientific publications.

The Soviet period was marked by several changes but, in general, autonomous republics and territories were created using ethnic criteria to delimit the borders of the geographical-administrative structures, with Circassian names used in the titles of the entities.<sup>238</sup> As analysed by Rogers Brubaker and others the creation of territorial units, during the Soviet period, among non-Russian peoples such as the Circassians increased their legitimacy and to some degree strengthened local culture and language. The actual creation of these units were still marked by centralised control and supervision from Moscow: the Circassian peoples were placed on different levels in the territorial-administrative hierarchy on the secondary (as autonomous republic) and tertiary level (as autonomous area); two of the Circassian peoples were placed in double-titular republics with

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<sup>236</sup> New Encyclopædia Britannica (1992, vol. 14: 174).

<sup>237</sup> By the second half of the nineteenth century, mountain climbers from outside Russia were showing an interest in the Caucasus. In 1874, a British expedition became the first to climb the highest peak of Elbrus.

<sup>238</sup> The continued institutionalisation of a Circassian ethnic identity with strong territorial links to the historical homeland was not just a Soviet legacy - often labelled as Soviet ethnic engineering - as is occasionally stated.

Balkars and Karachai, respectively. Balkars and Karachai are related Turkish speaking peoples, which illustrates that it was a conscious decision to avoid placing the Circassians in one and the same republic. The creation of these republics, on the one hand, enforced a territorial affinity through continued institutionalisation, including support to develop and maintain the Circassian language(s), while on the other, the artificially created ethnic categories of ‘Adyg’ and ‘Cherkes’ also represented the creation of a further division among the Circassians. This also represents a Soviet heritage which is sometimes forgotten or overlooked in analyses of Soviet so-called ‘nationality policies’.

The territorial institutionalisation of the Circassians in three units continued after the creation of the Russian Federation in 1991, although now they were all elevated to the same level as ‘federal republics’. Although new discussions on the creation of new units without ethnically defined borders and names occurred from time to time - especially from politicians in Moscow or the neighbouring regions (krai) of Krasnodar and Stavropol - but these were always rejected from within the republics.

## **Concludingly**

Two overall competing images - imaginary geographies - of Circassia was produced during the first part of the nineteenth century until 1864 as Circassia became subject to geopolitical competition between two modern colonial empires, where these images were formulated. This geopolitical competition resulted in a considerable larger space for the Circassian counter-version vis-a-vis the European colonising empire (Russia) than was the case in many similar colonial contexts at the time. What Edward Said described as the ‘silent’ subjects in his theory on Orientalism or as stated by Paul Carter in relation to the Australian context: “White invasion was a form of spatial writing that erased the earlier meaning” (Gregory 1994, 173). On the one hand, the Circassia neither had an urban centre with modern institutions, nor a written language standard expressed in publications, on the other, Circassian positions and protests against Russian colonisation was clearly voiced through British, Ottoman and other sympathetic actors, including politicians and newspapers.

After 1864, the land on both sides of the Kuban River became Kuban, as illustrated by the re naming of the Cossacks of the area into the Kuban Cossacks, though divided into different territorial units, this marked the beginning of a prolonged period of colonial settlement in the area. Still, the symbolic and partly contradictory duality represented by the romantic writings contra the dangerous military adversary survived in a different form after the final conquest: On the one hand, the remaining pockets of Circassians became further categorised and institutionalised into the

modernising Russian Empire, in particular through the regional centre in Tiflis. On the other hand, the romantic myth initially created by Pushkin, Lermontov etc. continued to exist until today as their productions became canonised as the golden age of Russian literature and part of the curricular in both Soviet and Russian schools. In the second part of the nineteenth century, this myth was reformulated and circulated through popular illustrated publications (for instance the so-called *lubok*'s) as a parallel to booklets on the Wild West, Cowboys and Indians, well-known in the west.

The power-knowledge system of a modern colonising empire of the nineteenth century and how this resulted in the creation of 'imaginative geographies' of the colonised areas as described by Edward Said was also taking place in the Circassian/Caucasian context. One of the ideas promoted by the imperial power-knowledge system was ethno-national classifications that were performed in the newly colonised areas, including their spatial locations on ethnographic maps.<sup>239</sup> These ideas or principles were also known to the Circassians and played a key role in their attempts at 'ethno-national' unification as part of their resistance against colonisation.

The classical dominance of colonial spatiality over the indigenous spatiality described by Derek Gregory (1994, 173) to a certain degree also unfolded in the case of the Circassians in Russia after 1864, but, the significant production of (modern) Circassian spatiality as part of the resistance against colonisation. Indigenous Circassian spatiality was redefined during the first half of the nineteenth century because of the pressure and threat from Russia. Within Circassia this culminated in the 1830s and again in the 1860s with the Circassian attempts to establish a nation-state, and seeking alliances abroad to stronger partners, and seeking international recognition. Jointly all of this set a precedent for the present Circassian revival. After 1864 the Circassian spatiality was formally replaced by a colonial spatiality though this included some indigenous elements (district boundaries, names, museums), while the rest now primarily belonged to the private sphere (which included taking care of historical items as can be seen in many of today's museums). Also a form of 'third version' was created by actors such as Nogmov and Khan-Girei, both of whom were in the service of the Russian army and empire but still attempted to promote a 'Circassia within Russia' (and had their publications censored). Today the 'third versions' form an important part of the Circassian revival, where their books are published, republished and translated as key items in the reconstruction of Circassian history and identity. As such they have informally been canonised and have attained iconographical status. These works – together with the illustrated nineteenth century books by the British actors that stayed for longer period in Circassia at the time, together with the works of a few others, play a significant role or position in the ongoing Circassian revival. The same can be said about the different 'cracks' in the colonial spatiality that, during various periods,

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<sup>239</sup> Though only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the European empires forced to assign state-building legitimacy to these ethno-territorial principles beyond Europe.

has given room for 'Circassianess' to be represented - whether in science, museums, administration, naming etc. The 'colonial spatiality' might be dominant but never without cracks of otherness, countering and resistance - in spite of the relative lenience of dominating a colonised and displaced culture largely without writing or urbanely based institutions.

## *Chapter 5*

### **Territorial Institutionalisation of Circassianness**

A model developed by the geographer Anssi Paasi for the study of a modern territorial institutionalisation process with an historical perspective, could be used as part of a general analytical framework for the analysis of the Circassian revival. However, in this short chapter the ambition is more moderate: to discuss the institutionalisation of Circassian territoriality through inspiration from Paasi's model. The analytical approach suggested by Paasi is a way of assessing the development of a geographic-territorial identity as part of processes of institutionalisation, which can focus on different kinds of units such as nation-states or regions, including transboundary regions that may include an element of contestedness (Paasi 1995). The main point of Paasi's model is that institutionalisation can be applied as an analytic approach to address different processes of identity building and counter-building during shifting governmental systems. The model is a framework that offers an opportunity to include some of the key events from the nineteenth century, including prior to the final exile in 1864, and this plays a significant role in the ongoing formulation and reformulation of Circassian identity on the Internet today. The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the use of the above-mentioned analytical terms of territorial or geo-spatial institutionalisation and electronic/digital capitalism to understand the (new) virtual territoriality of Circassia in the light of the (historical) institutionalisation of Circassian territoriality.

As an extension of the discussion and presentation in Chapter 4 of the different key aspects of the production and reproduction of Circassianness<sup>240</sup> since the early nineteenth century, the aim is now to present and discuss the institutionalisation of Circassia (including the pockets of Circassians left after 1864) over time as a territorial or geo-spatial entity through the use of the analytical model developed by the Finnish geographer Anssi Paasi (1986, 1995).<sup>241</sup> The 'region' is the geo-spatial unit that Paasi, as a geographer, has especially focused on. Among the objects of Paasi's analysis can be mentioned Finnish border regions and territories - including when Finnish regions changed border demarcations with Russia/the Soviet Union - but Paasi stresses that the model can also be used on other forms of geographical-territorial delimitations, also including for instance nation-

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<sup>240</sup> Partly inspired by the use the term 'nationhood' by Rogers Brubaker.

<sup>241</sup> In later writings, Paasi has stressed the role of the region or the geo-spatial entity as developed not only by bounded but also unbounded forces, that not necessarily are embedded in the place, such as networks and other forms of flows (Paasi 2009, 213; Jones and Paasi 2013, 3). Late-modern globalisation has resulted in terms such as 'flows' and 'networks' increasingly becoming relevant in the discussion of territorial identities.

states. The model operates with four phases of institutionalisation: establishment of territorial form; territorial symbols; development of institutions; and consolidation. Through these, a geographical entity achieves a certain territorial identity that may include contested versions.<sup>242</sup> This is an approach to analytically discussing territorial identities through the modern era of the last two hundred years, challenged by periods of war and periods of shifting governmental systems, including the shift from Russia to the Soviet Union and, later, also the fall of the Soviet Union. This model on how geo-spatial identity is institutionalised - including contested identities - suggests a way of addressing ‘continuities’ or ‘historical strings’, some of which can be traced back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. This analytical framework represents a way of assessing and discussing the positions presented, for instance, on the Internet today. These often refer to historical sources or presents digitalised documentation from the nineteenth century, as found, for instance, in the archives of the former Russian Empire and other archives. Many of these representations of Circassianness, found on the Internet today, can be labelled as a kind of virtual challenge to the existing (formal) geo-spatial identities in the North Caucasus. This is in many ways similar to various cases of post-imperial/post-colonial countering found in different colonised or formerly colonised territories around the globe. The following sections represent an attempt to structure a discussion of territorial institutionalisation of Circassianness according to the terms suggested by Paasi.

As mentioned, Rogers Brubaker has also applied the term ‘institutionalisation’ in this analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet nation-building processes, including in competing forms by national minorities.<sup>243</sup> This is an institutionalisation that often is highly territorial as reflected in the ethnic definition of most of the federal republics in Russia. Brubaker has stressed the dynamic character of national minority identities and shifting stances or positions: “...we can think of a national minority not as a fixed entity or a unitary group but rather in terms of the *field of differentiated and competitive positions or stances* adopted by different organizations, parties, movements, or individual political entrepreneurs, each seeking to “represent” the minority to its own putative members, to the host state, or to the outside world, each seeking to monopolize the legitimate representation of the group” (Brubaker 1996, 61). Such a multitude of positions or stances can also be found among Circassians though a movement in direction of convergence on a number of key issues can be observed, which in many ways is challenging the local Circassian political leadership in the three republics in Russia.

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<sup>242</sup> The fourth phase of ‘territorial consolidation’ is only partly relevant in the Circassian context.

<sup>243</sup> I have discussed these processes in relation to two campaigns among Circassians in Russia in 2010 in a draft paper, that is not included in this thesis, analysing the campaigns for establishment of a joint Circassian republic in Russia and for establishing ‘Circassian’ as the joint and only category for Circassians in the 2010 census.

Brubaker argues that institutionalised definitions of nationhood from the Soviet period both contributed to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and has continued “to shape and structure the national question” in the post-Soviet successor states (Brubaker 1994, 47). Brubaker distinguishes between two forms of institutionalisation of nationhood and nationality in the Soviet Union: “territorial and political on the one hand, ethnocultural and personal on the other hand” (Brubaker 1994, 47).<sup>244</sup> “The Soviet institutions of territorial nationhood and personal nationality constituted a pervasive system of social classification, and organising “principle of vision and division” of the social world, a standardised scheme of social accounting, and interpretative grid for public discussion, a set of boundary-markers, a legitimate form for public and private identities, and, when political space expanded under Gorbachev, a ready-made template for claims to sovereignty” (48).

### **Phase 1. The establishment of territorial form**

Paasi defines the establishment of territorial form as “the development of the social practices through which the region<sup>245</sup> achieves its boundaries and will become identified as a distinct unit in the spatial structure of the society”, and he continues, “the emergence of territorial shape is a process in which the power relations in society, manifesting themselves in political, administrative/bureaucratic, economic and symbolic institutions, for instance, play a crucial role” (Paasi 1986, 124).

Many maps showing cartographic representations of Circassia exist and many can be found on the Internet. The names ‘Circassia’ and ‘the Circassians’ can be found on maps - in atlases and on globes - from the sixteenth century onwards and up to the nineteenth century. These old maps often have no clearly defined demarcations of borders in the form of lines or a colour code.

Two simple cartographic representations of Circassia before 1864 have achieved widespread reproduction and circulation, which has further accelerated with the increased role of the Internet as a multi-media outlet.<sup>246</sup> Both are roughly outlined maps without great detail beyond the borders and easy to reproduce in books or on the Internet. The most prominent appear to be the nineteenth-century version that shows Circassia from 1830 as located (roughly) between the Kuban River to

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<sup>244</sup> In a paper that is not including in this thesis I discuss the 2010 Circassian campaigns for the establishment of one joint Circassian republic in Russia and for being assigned as one people in the 2010 all-Russian population census, respectively.

<sup>245</sup> In the work of Paasi mostly referred to here, he especially applies the geographical term ‘region’. The objects of his own investigations included Finnish border regions and territories but he stresses that the model can also be used on other forms of geographical delimitations, such as for instance nation-states.

<sup>246</sup> For instance [www.justicefromthecaucas.com/maps.html](http://www.justicefromthecaucas.com/maps.html) and [www.zum.de/whkmla/region/russia/xcircassia.html](http://www.zum.de/whkmla/region/russia/xcircassia.html).



the north/north-east, the Black Sea to the west and the main Caucasus mountain range to the south. Somehow, incorrectly, the map includes a narrow strip of land reaching into neighbouring Kabarda, which had already been included within Russia many years earlier. The other map shows Circassia from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that was double or triple in size, reaching up to the mouth of the river Don, covering both sides of the Kuban River and reaching well into both sides of the Terek River to the east.

The discourse on the meaning of borders gradually changed during the nineteenth century, which only serves to increase the symbolic value of the cartographic representations of the Circassian borders at the time. In the North Caucasus, the establishment of territorial/regional form in a modern understanding initially took place during a long-lasting war. In the beginning, a relatively abstract frontier zone was established: the southern frontier of the Russian Empire between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. In the late 18th century, a line of army fortifications, including contingents of armed Cossacks, was established stretching from sea to sea. This could be regarded as a representation of a new northern boundary for in the North Caucasus region that bordered Circassia along large parts of the Kuban River up to the Black Sea.<sup>247</sup> The meaning of this new demarcation became stronger as soon as the Trans-Caucasian territories were finally subdued and incorporated into Russia, thus making Circassia an entity encapsulated within the Imperial Russian territory (and between two seas). From 1829 on, control over the Circassian Black Sea coast was formally transferred to Russia from the Ottoman Empire according to the Treaty of Adrianople, though this is contested not just by Circassian leaders but also by representatives of other states, including Great Britain.<sup>248</sup> Formally this meant that Russia had managed to encircle Circassia on all three sides.<sup>249</sup> This post-1829 and pre-1864 version of Circassia is also often found on different types of maps, as the cartographic sources of the Russian army increasingly became available to the public and as the Western media followed the progression of the war. It is also this version of Circassia that the Circassians suggested the Russian leadership to respect and recognise, as was illustrated when Circassian representatives in the 1830s formally suggested a mutual agreement with the Russian leadership on the Kuban River forming the border between Circassia and Russia.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> The fortified line followed the Kuban and Terek rivers. According to Jeremy Black, these two rivers defined Russia's Caucasian frontier in the late eighteenth century (Black 1994, 21). These first cartographic representations of the North Caucasus as a region were created by representatives of the dominant outsiders, but the names that were used, along with other elements of new symbolic significance connected to visual representations of territory, became the subject of rival interpretations.

<sup>248</sup> In the nineteenth century, post-war peace negotiations and subsequent treaties generally established the recognised borders between states and the imperial powers mostly dominated the negotiations.

<sup>249</sup> This encirclement was a strategy of the Russian Army (and Navy), as not only could arms and gunpowder be blocked from arriving in Circassia but also the salt that was essential for the physical health of the Circassians (Longworth 1840 (vol. 2), 90).

<sup>250</sup> Longworth 1840 (vol. 1).

The disappearance of Circassia and presentation of the lands as part of Russia on maps produced in Russia that was circulated beyond the borders of the Russian Empire, became one of the central points of protest from the Circassian leaders in their renewed campaign for international recognition in the 1830s (CM2).<sup>251</sup>

## **Phase 2. The establishment of territorial symbols / symbolic shape**

“Regions that are ‘ideas’ rather than fixed administrative entities are not usually promulgated by any central authority, but have emerged with time through interplay between the inhabitants and the institutions of society,” says Paasi (1986, 125). In the case of Circassia, the territory existed for centuries as a pre-modern territory that over the years increasingly was bordering on colonies of Cossacks, either free or in the service of the Russian army, as well as various nomadic groups and Crimean Tatars. The presence of the Cossacks in the Caucasus marked the beginning of a new period of interaction with Russia. The Cossacks, for instance, took on a number of Circassian traditions, including weapons and the local costume known as the Cherkeska. From the beginning of the nineteenth century the violent interplay between the two directly involved actors, the Russian army and the Circassian resistance, began. The ‘idea’ (or image) of Circassia as a territorial entity, that was roughly established before the beginning of the war, was radically strengthened and strongly canonised by the new role in Russian literature from the 1820s on. It was then further strengthened by the emerging geopolitical competition between Russia and Great Britain over influence in Circassia which created two competing - and mutually contested - images of Circassia: the noble freedom-loving natives (slowly becoming a modern nation) as opposed to an ever changing mix of noble savages (to be civilised) and untameable relentless warriors (to be exterminated).

In the course of the decades from the 1830s to the 1860s, a strong public mythology grew up around the Circassians - together with the North-Eastern Caucasian mountaineers (mainly the Chechens and the Avars as led by Imam Shamil), which was known well beyond Russia, Ottoman Turkey and the Caucasus, and which lasted at least for the remaining part of the century.<sup>252</sup> Due to the emergence of print capitalism in Russia, and in particular the romantic narratives unfolding in the grandiose Caucasian settings, and in the more popular publications, this frontier became a parallel to the Wild West of USA. This was achieved through printing and publication in the West as well,

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<sup>251</sup> See: ‘Declaration of Circassian Independence’, *The Portfolio* (Vol. 1, 1836), see appendix.

<sup>252</sup> Many texts from this period are therefore found - digitalised and circulated - within the contemporary Circassian revival.

including Denmark, often with Cossacks in the role of the rough cowboys, Circassians in the role of the wild Indians, and the Russian army as the cavalry. While in real life, many natives were slaughtered, their land was scorched and many Russian soldiers were killed, an 'idea' of the region as a romantic but wild place was created, and filled with myths.

Paasi remarks that "symbols are instrumental in the sense that they serve to evoke powerful emotions of identification with territorial groupings and can generate action. Symbols are 'keywords' in the dominating story of a territorially-based community" (Paasi 1995, 34). In a territory where the borders are pre-modern - at least as seen from the position of one of the parties - the growing and approaching Russian Empire, with its administrative system and a production of cultural representation, - was able to 'create' the 'dominant story' and the symbols attached to it achieved great importance. In a colonial setting like Circassia in the North Caucasus, the dominant story is established by the dominant 'outsiders' - the colonising empire. A competing story is, however, established by 'the insiders' - the Circassians. The area becomes a battlefield of symbols, which are often used deliberately by the dominant Russian side. These symbols have different meanings for the 'insiders' / the Circassians in their own 'story'. The two narratives dialectically constitute the territorial identity, in which rivalry and conflict play a major symbolic role.

Apart from the symbolic features connected to the landscape, the historically institutionalised image of the region in Russia also contains a prototypical image of Caucasians in general. This Russian image of otherness, formed by distance in time and space, has significant racist or xenophobic connotations. As an area perceived as being without fixed borders, an understanding of Circassia (as well as most of the remaining North Caucasus) has arisen as a territory inhabited by a core population of mountaineers, the Caucasians or the Circassians. When the word 'Circassians' (or just simply 'Caucasians', often implying the descendants of another mountain peoples such as, for instance, the Chechens) is mentioned in the Russian public sphere, most ordinary Russian citizens construct an image of an institutionalised Caucasian prototype. This kind of prototype has been - and still is - a huge part of an institutionalised image of the North Caucasian region as seen by the many outsiders. These elements are central to understanding today's anti-Caucasian xenophobia in Russia, and the fact that such extremely violent wars as the ones in Chechnya can take place within its borders.

The Elbrus Mountain - with 5642 meters the highest mountain in Europe<sup>253</sup> - has become a central topographical symbol among the Circassians.<sup>254</sup> Just as the Circassian flag Elbrus is used as a

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<sup>253</sup> Elbrus share an element of 'hiddenness' with the Circassians as it is still unknown to many that this is the highest mountain in Europe. This is partly due to ignorance and partly due to different understandings on how to define the

symbol by a many Circassian organisations, media outlets, companies and individuals (for instance as avatars on the Internet forums and social media). However, Elbrus is a Caucasian symbol that is also used by others, in particular, the Balkars and Karachais, who live in areas adjacent to Elbrus. Another mountain that has been brought to attention due to the Sochi Olympics is Mount Fisht, located north of Sochi, after which the Olympic stadium was named in 2012.<sup>255</sup> This marks an attempt by the organisers to promote a specific version of one of the key Caucasian legends: the Prometheus legend. The name Fisht is of Circassian origin and the mountain has a significant role in Circassian history and legends. Fisht is located on the border between Adygea Republic and Krasnodar Krai, and an identity conflict was outplayed on this mountain in the 2000s when a large cross was placed on the mountain and subsequently was removed by Circassian activists.<sup>256</sup>

Territorial symbols are often more or less abstract expressions of group solidarity (Paasi 1986, 125). Today, in the North Caucasus, on the level of the republics, groups each with their territorial symbols exist side by side. In the Adygea Republic, they chose to introduce the joint Circassian flag from the 1830s as the official flag of the republic, resulting in a strong institutional practice of using and reproducing the flag, also including the official website and a number of websites linking to it.

Identity-building or nationalism at the level of ethnic groups and ethno-territorial entities in the North Caucasus is often seen as a relatively new phenomenon in the region. Jane Ormrod cites two Soviet scholars for stating that North Caucasian national consciousness still - in the 1920s and early 1930s - consisted of a local, clan-consciousness, together with “a parallel consciousness of a huge ethnic society of North Caucasian gorskii” (mountaineers) (Ormrod 1993, 451).<sup>257</sup> This system of twin-identities existed until the Soviet nationality policies finally were victorious in the region after a period of ‘resocialisation’. According to Ronald G. Suny, the nationality policies of the Soviet

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border between Europe and Asia. This to some degree also illustrates that Eurocentric tendencies still prevail and an ambiguity towards this Euro-Asian borderland in general.

<sup>254</sup> See Appendix for examples of visual representations.

<sup>255</sup> See Chapter 9 for more on the role of Fisht.

<sup>256</sup> Natpress.net/index.php?newsid=3595, 22-08-2009.

<sup>257</sup> The pan-(North)Caucasian or Gorsky identity level resulted in the creation of the Mountain Republic in 1918 that after the victory of the Bolsheviks in the post-revolution civil war in Russia, which the peoples and states of the Caucasus became a part of in spite of their claims of independence. In 1920 the Soviet Mountain republics were established but this entity was soon broken up into smaller and mainly ethnically defined units. The leaders of the 1918 Mountain Republic went into exile in Turkey where the legacy and the idea of the Mountain Republic still have many supporters. In relation to Perestroika and the fall of the Soviet Union, a new organisation that built on similar ideas was established, the Confederation of Mountain Peoples in the Caucasus. (Pan-North Caucasian political unity was also requested by the Western great powers in order to achieve support - both in relation to the Crimean War and in the aftermath of the First World War).

Union in the North Caucasus for the first time “provided clear political and territorial identity as alternatives to earlier religious and tribal solidarity” (Suny 1991, 68). As seen in the case of Circassia and the Circassians this is an oversimplification that is only partly true - in spite of being repeated again and again.

The symbolic importance of being upgraded to a titular-nationality in the Soviet system was significant. The symbolic meaning of institutionalising the ties between ethnic group and territory has been illustrated in the conflicts of the 1990s, where the legitimacy for the underlying claims, are often drawn from this very bond. Out of the Circassians, the population of Adyghea and Karachai-Cherkessia achieved an elevated status as new republics of the Russian Federation - now on the same level as the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria.

The *name* of a territorial entity is obviously an important symbol, and this “usually ‘gathers’ together its historical development, its important events, episodes and memories and joins the personal histories of its inhabitants to this collective heritage” (Paasi 1995, 35). From about the 1240s onwards, the word ‘Cherkess’ (or ‘Circassians/Circassia’) appears in a relatively high number of sources. The name Cherkess, which comes from the Turkic designation for the Adyghe, was adopted by other nations and became fixed in European and Eastern literature.<sup>258</sup> A number of events, episodes and memories are gathered in the name ‘Circassia’ and a strong mythology attached, as described above. As mentioned earlier, the connotations of the name, as a symbol of territorial identity, are different when it comes to ‘outsiders’. In many Russian sources from the nineteenth century the area is referred to as Kuban or Zakubanye - which means ‘the other side of the Kuban River’ - from a Russian perspective.<sup>259</sup>

Along with Paasi, Peter Jackson considers *naming* an essential part of the making of spatial history and adds a dimension of imperialism: “The naming and renaming of places is a crucial aspect of geographical ‘discovery’, establishing proprietorial claims through linguistic association with the colonising power”, and “spatial history ‘begins and ends in language’; by the act of naming, space is symbolically transformed into place, a space with a history” (Jackson 1989/1992, 168). The

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<sup>258</sup> Among the many places that references to historical Circassia can be found are the State Historical Museum of Russia in Moscow, where ‘Circassia’ happens to be mentioned on maps that are used to illustrate other aspects of the expansion of the Russian Empire. Mostly located along the fringes of these maps.

<sup>259</sup> Today the region is formally called Krasnodar Krai but Kuban is to most popularly used name.

establishment of proprietorial claims by the Russian colonisers was distinct, not only because they established fortifications and towns with Russian names, but also because of the very meaning of those names in the neighbouring areas, such as Vladikavkaz ('Ruler of the Caucasus') and Grozny ('Terrible' or 'Menacing'), referring to a former Russian Tsar.

The element of naming has been important in the Russification of the North Caucasian territory and its communities.<sup>260</sup> After the fall of the Soviet Union, 'de-Russification' and 're-naming' has frequently been discussed, partly because of the heavy symbolism of Russian dominance embedded in these names. Ideas of renaming are often abandoned, however, as they often collide with strongly institutionalised everyday practice.<sup>261</sup>

Today the Circassian revival, online as well as offline, is challenging the production of geo-spatial identity in the area of the former Circassia that now is known as Kuban and Krasnodar Krai. Here the Kuban Cossacks in recent years also have reinvigorated a revival process that is in line with a general Kremlin-led refocusing on Russian nationalism including a focus on orthodox religion combined with a local element of how Cossacks played a key role in the conquering, colonisation and subsequent cultivation of the land (most forgetting that the land had been cultivated through centuries by the Circassians and other Caucasian peoples).<sup>262</sup> Kuban Cossacks issues and organisations have played a key role in politics in Krasnodar Krai since the fall of the Soviet Union - this already significant symbolic role of the Cossacks in the Kuban region has now been further upgraded, for instance, through increased funding for events that often have strong elements of memorialisation.<sup>263</sup> This is illustrated by, for instance, the creation of a public movement in 2012 by the head of Krasnodar Krai, Governor Alexander Tkachev, to promote the programme 'For Faith, the Kuban and the Fatherland'.<sup>264</sup> This development, together with the enforced celebrations of the 'voluntary' Circassian-Russian interaction for 450 years as celebrated widely in 2007 and the attempts at downplaying Circassian history in the region within the project of the 2014 Sochi Olympics, outline some of the key positions in the renewed competition on the geo-spatial identity

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<sup>260</sup> For instance, personal names have been Russified through the addition of Russian endings and patronyms, many names for geographical phenomena such as rivers or mountains have kept their names of, for instance, Persian origin, but now in a Russian form, and most 'modern' words or expressions have entered the local languages in their Russian form.

<sup>261</sup> For instance, when the name of a town is the result of the forced relocation of four villages into one - which of the four original names should be used? There are countless examples of such dilemmas in the North Caucasus.

<sup>262</sup> It is likely that the renewed Kuban Cossack revival of recent years is, partly at least, motivated by the advance and increased visibility of the post-2005 Circassian revival. That in turn was partly motivated by the suggestion to include Adygea into Krasnodar Krai - an idea that had widespread support from Kuban Cossack representatives.

<sup>263</sup>

<sup>264</sup> This type of formulation mirror the old version, "For Country, God and Tsar", well-known among Cossacks and soldiers for centuries (Blanch 1960/1978, 102). The programme and movement was a reaction to the Pussy Punk event in Moscow in 2011 ([vpered-kr.ru/raion/actual/2454-for-faith-kuban-and-fatherland.html](http://vpered-kr.ru/raion/actual/2454-for-faith-kuban-and-fatherland.html)).

of this particular geographic area. The role of the virtual reterritorialisation will be discussed in Chapter 6 (iCircassia).

### **Phase 3. The development of institutions**

The establishment of social institutions and organisations is of decisive significance for the development of a territorial consciousness, as these are the bearers of the history and traditions of the society / community. They take part in the running reproduction of social consciousness, including territorial consciousness (Paasi 1986, 125). Because of this function of the institutions in the development of territorial consciousness, the discussion of this phase is largely taken together with a discussion of the structures of expectation, here exemplified through the role of language.

With the introduction of Soviet power in the region, a much stronger emphasis was placed on establishing formal institutions than had been the case under Imperial Russian rule, when the area was predominantly a military district. These institutions were not just the obvious governmental institutions, such as ministries at the sub-regional (autonomous republican) level with the capacity to implement direct power and control over the communities in the area. A wide range of spheres were exposed to Soviet institutionalisation and, in some cultural spheres, Soviet institutions brought more indirect Russian culturally-flavoured influences into the Circassian areas of the North Caucasus.

The transformations in agriculture, industry and education during the Soviet period were also obvious discontinuities with the institutionalisation processes of the Circassian areas, since such institutions are carriers of locally-specific structures of expectations and symbolic content. Many examples of institutional changes can be discussed within this framework - I have chosen to refer to *language* as an example. As a by-product of this type of modernisation process, coinciding with the introduction of strictly Soviet institutional structures, the Russian language as one of these institutions gained a much stronger role than before. Language is a central institution as it inevitably plays a part in most other institutions. Since the North Caucasian sub-regions - the autonomous republics and districts were often composed of two or more peoples as titular nationalities speaking mutually unintelligible languages, the role of the Russian language had to be upgraded in public life. Having a dominant role as written language - in books, in newspapers and magazines, in radio, in television, in schools and universities etc., the Russian language is today steadily being reproduced. As mentioned earlier, however, reverse processes are also taking place at other levels of society. For instance, in publications in the local Circassian languages; even though only a limited number of people can actually read them, these are institutions of general symbolic

significance. Nonetheless, the local, national or ethnical media mainly use the Russian language in their publications, spiced with a few symbolic words from the local language.

Language is a key issue for many Circassians - among the diaspora as well as in the homeland - on a number of different levels. Language issues are frequently discussed on Circassian websites, where they are often faced with language dilemmas in very practical terms.<sup>265</sup> Should the Circassian language with the Cyrillic alphabet, as used in republics in Russia be promoted among the diaspora and used on their websites? Or should Latin or Arabic alphabets be introduced? Language is traditionally one of the key elements of ethnic or national identity but many Circassians in the diaspora have recently lost their language.<sup>266</sup> How will the Circassian organisations and websites address this challenge? This is also an emotional issue which many still hesitate to engage in. Circassian websites generally have to use several languages and many wish to add new languages or are in the process of preparing for this (which often requires extra human and financial resources). In Russia, Russian is still the most important common language of the websites, as is the case of Turkish in Turkey - and in many of the countries in the West where Circassians have migrated to from Turkey.

Still, it is important to stress - as with barriers presented by a lack of access to the Internet - that language also constitutes a barrier and excluding factor for many Circassians. There is still a digital divide to be bridged.

## **Conclusion**

The analytical model suggested by Anssi Paasi on how geo-spatial identity is institutionalised - including contested or countered identities - suggests a way of addressing historical 'continuities' or 'strings' back in time (*longue duree*). Key themes or items of investigation such as cartographic representations, the role of names and landscape representations as territorial symbols etc. can illustrate how territorial identities - including the competing and the contesting versions - have been institutionalised over time. In this case, in the era of modernity from the beginning of the nineteenth century until today. And as illustrated above, this production of an identity that from the outset was geo-spatial continued among Circassians in exile and has since moved on to the Internet.

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<sup>265</sup> For instance [www.geocities.com/jaimoukha](http://www.geocities.com/jaimoukha)

<sup>266</sup> As mentioned elsewhere, this has functioned as a mobilising factor within the Circassian revival.



For centuries Circassia in one form or another was found largely on both sides of the Kuban River, as illustrated by a high number of old maps. From late 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian ambitions in the Caucasus became clear with the establishment of a number of fortifications joined together as a fortified line that could gradually be pushed further southward as the Russian colonisation progressed. The increased Russian pressure, that had increased with the formal transfer of control over the Circassian Black Sea coast to Russia according to the 1829 Treaty of Adrianople (though strongly contested), resulted in a suggestion from the Circassian leaders to Russia to accept the Kuban River as the formal border between the two countries (Longworth 1840, vol. 1, 162).<sup>267</sup> This meant that the Circassian leaders at this point accepted the loss of territories of Kabarda to the east. This illustrates a will to compromise with the new large and powerful actor from the side of the Circassian leaders that from time to time have been of being involved in a hopeless resistance which only had worsened their situation. But Russia felt too strong and superior to acknowledge the proposal - and somehow believed in the civilising mission and the legitimate right to territorial imperial expansion. Basically a classic encounter between the right to national self-determination and colonial expansion, which is one of the key geopolitical features of the nineteenth century. The principle of national self-determination that led to the establishment of an increasing number of nation-states but in large parts of the nineteenth century this was a Eurocentric understanding according to which continued colonisation of peoples that could be assigned as uncivilised could still be legitimate. Nineteenth century Circassia could be designated as uncivilised or pre-modern according to certain features of society but it appears as Circassia was too early in their claims for international recognition as a nation-state as the dominating European powers were largely not fully ready to appoint the principles of the right the national self-determination to this region in the Euro-Asian borderlands. In spite of the support from significant actors in Britain, France and other states. By insisting on labelling the region as Asian and peoples as uncivilised it was easier for the Russian Empire to achieve final international acceptance of their annexation of the Caucasus, though this was further enhanced by the geopolitical strength of Russia in the area.

The Circassia that asked for international recognition as a nation-state in the nineteenth century had a form of confederate character with largely independent provinces and without central government except in times of crisis or an external threat. In one of the Circassian appeals to the European powers they also expressed a willingness to become a 'vassal' of friendly empires of Britain or the

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<sup>267</sup> This was the territory called Zakubanyie in Russia. In particular the Black Sea coastline was considered of strategic interest to Russia.

Ottomans. This illustrates transitional character of the nineteenth century context in the Caucasus as the Circassian leaders suggested both recognition as a nation-state and alternatively as a vassal state of a friendly empire. Vassal (state) status is generally understood as a premodern phenomenon of linking smaller territories to historical empires. For instance, the neighbouring Crimean Khanate had through centuries functioned as a vassal of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>268</sup>

Today historians generally agree that Circassia was tricked - even twice - in relation to the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829. First the Ottoman Empire as the losing part managed to give up control over the Circassian Black Sea coast without actually possessing one or two trading post. Probably in an attempt to reduce their loss they chose to sacrifice a small ally that Russia was interested in. When this resulted in strong reactions and discussions in Britain, Circassia was once more deceived as the British ambassador in St. Petersburg managed to persuade his government that the Ottomans actually possessed a key fortress on the coast which they therefore could pass on to Russia - in spite of the fact that the fortress had been abandoned in 1790 (Longworth 1840, vol. 1, 306). Which illustrates not just the difficulties of smaller actors in the geopolitical games of the nineteenth century but also how the lack of proper information - including cartographic - could make this manipulation possible. Still, the treaty and the way Circassia and the Circassians was manipulated in the process was part of the motivation for the involvement of Urquhart, Bell, Longworth and other British actors in the 1830s - all of whom play a significant part in the contemporary mediated Circassian memorialisation.

Overall, the Russian conquest led to the renaming of Circassia into the Kuban. A large number of the names of Circassian origin survived the transition, however, in particular topographic names (river and mountains, in particular), while many of the villages were established by settlers from Russia and often, though not always, were given Russian names. This might be, partly at least, due to the extended period of warfare and conquest during which Circassian names were researched and entered the maps of the Russia army. For instance, based on the information achieved by agents of the Russian army seeking detailed topographical information behind enemy lines, such as illustrated by the Russian officer Fyodor Tornau mentioned above. In other words, the land was not just an empty canvas on which to write new content as seen in other colonial setting around the world at the time.

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<sup>268</sup> The annexation of the Crimean Khanate by Russian Empire in the late eighteenth century also designated the Russian ambitions towards the Caucasus.

During the Soviet period, Circassian *names* returned as titular-nationalities in republics in the North Caucasus. Though this is not a solely Soviet invention as is sometimes claimed. Before the Russian revolution territorial sub-divisions in the North Caucasus were often made according the ethnicity as seen, for instance, in relation to the Kabardians. After the fall of the Soviet Union this trend was further extended with the upgrading of the status of Adygea and Karachai-Cherkessia to federal republics. All in all, this represents not just a gradually increasing institutionalisation of Circassian geo-spatial identity but also illustrates the increasing legitimacy assigned to the link between ethnicity and territory. Which is not just a post-Soviet trend but can be found in many places around the world.

That many topographic names are of Circassian origin are frequently mentioned by the tourist guides who annually assist thousands of Russian tourists by the Sochi Black Sea Rivera. Beyond this information provided, for instance, during tourist excursions by bus, the Circassian names of villages and towns generally represent 'local exotica'. The items sold to tourists includes, for instance, blankets, bags, caps etc. with prints, though generally only those who have been on a bus excursion actually know that this local Caucasian exotica is of Circassian origin. The emergence of a Russian Rivera from the late nineteenth century also signify the ambition of establishing a tourist resort for the increasing number of wealthy Russians in central parts of the empire after French Mediterranean example. This marked the second wave of tourism in the former Circassian areas after the spas were established in the first half of the century in the eastern part centred on Piatigorsk. The introduction of new Russian tourism oriented towards spectacular Caucasian natural landscapes was from the beginning of the nineteenth century part of the Russian colonisation of the former Circassian areas. This resulted in a continued institutionalisation into Russia through tourism which included, for instance, guidebooks, where the nature and varying degrees of the history of the area now was represented. As a parallel to the literary representations mentioned above.

To a large extent the Circassian languages benefitted from the Soviet institutionalisation - in spite of the changing phases of Russification versus Korenizatsia (indigenisation), the enforced use of the Cyrillic alphabet, etc. Today these results appears to be gradually fading in many places of Circassian residence, as part of a general global trend that is further enhanced by the growth of the Russian-language dominated media sphere, not least in television and on the Internet. The

consequences of a potential loss of the language for the geo-spatial identity of the Circassians is difficult to assess as this also depends on the developments of other factors. Still, it would denote the loss of one of the absolute most significant Circassian identity markers. Some predict that Kabardian could be the only Circassian language that will survive in the long run.

Informal institutions such as the family and civil society became key institutions for the survival of Circassian culture, language and traditions - in exile as well as in the homeland - after 1864. In particular due to village life as dominant among the Circassians that in cities of the diaspora was supplemented by cultural associations and foundations. All of which has formed an important basis for the presently ongoing Circassian revival.<sup>269</sup>

The increased parallel revival among Kuban Cossacks during recent years has pinpointed the return of a situation of increased competing territorial memorialisation and identity building - though largely unfolding in separate spheres. Though generally Cossack identity are regarded as less consolidated than is the case among the North Caucasian Mountain Peoples such as the Circassians the significant support from federal, regional and district levels in Russia might not just have given rejuvenated Kuban Cossack identity building process a renewed impetus but also, comparatively, have given them an advantage vis-a-vis the Circassian revival, that is mainly civil society driven, though also - to some degree - supported by the republican authorities in the North Caucasus. Thus, these increased and parallel revival processes also illustrates how the Northwestern Caucasus increasingly has become a playground for 'external' actors - whether from the Kremlin or the Circassian diaspora.

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<sup>269</sup> A form of long-distance institutionalisation of Circassianness continued in exile, as manifested for instance in the Circassian cultural associations. Due to these efforts, generation after generation, a basis for the contemporary Circassian activism of the recent decades was created. Narratives of the homeland and the tragic expulsion played a key role. This institutionalisation was mostly driven by local communities, villages and civil society actors in general.



## ***Chapter 6***

### **iCircassia? Digital Capitalism and New Transnational Identities**

The (almost) wholesale exile of the Circassians from their homeland in 1864 after the final victory of the Russian army resulted in Circassia literally being taken off the map. Nonetheless, countless cartographic representations of Circassia from the preceding centuries exist and have today been digitalised, presented and circulated on the Internet. Circassia has, in this way, little by little begun to come back ‘on the map’ - at least virtually. And to be ‘on the map’ is a strong metaphor, which this chapter will be investigating.

The total number of Circassians is today regarded as being somewhere between three and six million, spread across a number of countries. The largest contingent - perhaps more than two million - resides in Turkey. Other significant diaspora groups are found in Syria, Jordan, Israel, Germany, USA and Canada. In the Russian Federation there today reside between 700,000 and 800,000 Circassians in the three North Caucasian republics of Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachai-Cherkessia, with a few small communities on the Black Sea coast of Krasnodar Krai. The three names of Adygea, Kabarda and Cherkessia are all the names of Circassian peoples, who constitute the titular nationalities of these republics

Over the last few years, we have witnessed a strong rise in the number of Circassian websites, initiated by a number of individuals and organisations, with diverse aims - though all are united in the goals of presenting information on Circassian history, culture and identity. In the early part of the 2000s, many of the websites were simplistic projects initiated by various groups and individuals but, today, a large number of well-designed and well-functioning Circassian websites can be found. This includes a number of websites on broader Caucasian issues. In Turkey, the term Circassian (Cherkes in Turkish) has often been used as a collective term for all (North) Caucasian mountaineers (including, for instance, the Abkhassians). The many new (North) Caucasian websites - and the fact that they often link to each other or recycle each other’s texts - have resulted in a ‘multiplier effect’ of their visibility on the Internet. In this way, the joint sum becomes more than its single parts. This also increases the potential outreach towards relevant target groups - also beyond the Circassians and the Caucasians. The websites on Circassian issues all contribute to the

production and reproduction of contemporary Circassian identity. 'iCircassia' - Internet-Circassia - is my term for the joint efforts of the many web-based creations and recreations of an imaginary homeland.

The Internet has spawned a number of new challenges, opportunities and a new terminology for researchers of ethnic identity and nationalism, such as cyber-ethnography, electronic or Internet nations, virtual communities, digital diasporas etc. In this chapter, I argue that iCircassia is a virtual transnational ethnic space existing on the Internet, which both diaspora Circassians and homeland Circassians contribute to.<sup>270</sup> The websites can roughly be classified into two main groups: A) classic websites providing information and, for instance, functioning as tools for organisations (often including interactive discussion forums), and B) social web media, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc. The increased level of hyperlinking has, however, increasingly blurred the boundary between these two forms, in which, for instance, social Internet media increasingly is used as different or additional tools of communication by civil society organisations.

In many ways, 'iCircassia' is an 'imagined community' in the same sense as the nation-states analysed by Benedict Anderson in his 1983 book of the same name, where he employed the term 'print capitalism' to designate the way nation-states increasingly became institutionalised through the production, distribution and general utilization of printed representations from the nineteenth century. Similar processes of nation-building or ethnicity-building efforts have, however, unfolded among most of the ethnic groups found in the North Caucasus, through shifting phases and conditions over the last two hundred years, as will be illustrated in this chapter. This is, nonetheless, generally with a greater degree of civil society actor involvement as compared to the official nationalism of nation-states (Anderson 1983/1991, 163).<sup>271</sup> In the 1990s, the term 'print capitalism' was updated and elaborated by Arjun Appadurai and others to become the term 'electronic capitalism', which I use as a platform for discussing the recent developments among the Circassian websites. To further update the term into 'digital capitalism', I suggest distinguishing it from the former phase, which largely focused on the role of television and radio.

### **From Print to Electronic to Digital Capitalism**

The inspiration for this section is drawn mainly from two analytical terms applied to examine significant changes in communication technologies. Firstly, the shift from the two former phases of

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<sup>270</sup> This reflects a new and/or additional way of community building that is not unfolding only in cyberspace.

<sup>271</sup> In the Circassian republics in the North Caucasus, a secondary level of official nationalism unfolded during the Soviet period, and especially after 1991, albeit subject to a number of restrictions.

‘print capitalism’ and ‘electronic capitalism’, the two terms developed and/or discussed by Benedict Anderson (1983/1991) and Arjun Appadurai (1996), to the contemporary phase of ‘digital capitalism’. I have chosen to use the term digital capitalism due to the thematic relevance in continuing the two related above-mentioned terms, which are well-established in academic analyses. The contemporary ‘digital’ phase could also be labelled ‘digital mediation’ or ‘digital publishing’. I argue that this shift is reflected in the shift from the first post-Soviet Circassian revival (CR1) to the post-2005 contemporary Circassian revival (CR2). Secondly, the V.E.R.A.city loop model developed by Maximillian Forte for the analysis of processes of Internet-generated indigenous revival will be discussed in relation to CR2. According to Forte’s model, this process can be characterised as a continuous loop of four issues of visibility, embodiment, recognition and authenticity, which I find relevant in relation to the Circassian context.

In his book ‘Imagined Communities’ from 1983, Benedict Anderson describes how ‘print capitalism’ became instrumental in the construction of nationalism in the production of modern nation-states from the nineteenth century on. This relates to the use of printed media as a modern dimension in the development of new public spheres with a new role in societies - initially mostly in European contexts. In the aftermath of the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the ideas of Anderson gained prominent status in many scholarly analyses.<sup>272</sup> The processes of ‘imagining communities’ also takes place on levels other than the new nation-states - as has been illustrated on several occasions in the post-Communist world - for instance by ethnic minority groups that had or still have some form of secondary-level territorial-administrative autonomy often representing a hangover from the Soviet period (Hansen 2003). In several cases, this development has been part of an increased tension and conflicts between - new and often nationalising - nation-state and ethnic minority groups. This sometimes evolved into violent conflicts as seen, for instance, in relation to Kosovo/Serbia, Abkhazia/Georgia and Chechnya/Russia - though they all followed different paths. The process of print capitalism and nation-building - on a secondary sub-national level - also affected many other nationalities in the Caucasus, including the Circassians in the three republics of the region, where they constitute titular nationalities as Kabardians, Cherkess and Adygs respectively. The fact that Anderson ascribes the introduction of print capitalism - in a modern understanding - to the early phases of nationalism and national movements in the nineteenth century also renders it relevant to discuss in relation to Circassia and the Circassians in the

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<sup>272</sup> As was the case with other studies of nationalism.



nineteenth century. This is illustrated by the geopolitical competition and many printed representations mentioned earlier in this chapter.

In 1996 Arjun Appadurai (drawing inspiration from others) employed the term ‘electronic capitalism’ to encompass the changes in media technology - especially the role of television, radio and the initial version of the Internet (Appadurai 1996, 161).<sup>273</sup> Among the features of electronic capitalism highlighted by Appadurai, the ‘aural’ and ‘visual’ elements encompass a strong potential for the emotional engagement of target groups and potentially having a greater outreach towards audiences - though still largely non-digital. Furthermore, specific language skills, as in the case of the written media, are not required. Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union there was a significant rise in the number of publications on Circassian history and identity in the North Caucasus - including translations of books from the nineteenth century which had never before been published in the Soviet Union or in the preceding Russian Empire, where censorship usually prohibited this.<sup>274</sup> Some of these publications included eyewitness accounts that challenged the official history writing that many Circassian actors wished to revise. Many of these publications are now remediated and digitalised for presentation on the Internet - mostly free of charge.<sup>275</sup> Within a few years of 1991, electronic media began to gain importance in several of the North Caucasian republics, with a limited number of weekly hours of programming in the Circassian language on issues of Circassian history and traditions, which became very popular among audiences, as I observed during my field work in the 1990s. The 1990s were, for the Circassians in Russia, marked by an overlap of print and electronic capitalism, partly due to the delay of almost 150 years due to censorship and other restrictions on the free publication on issues relating to the Circassian minorities.

As an extension of the above-mentioned terms of Anderson and Appadurai, I have chosen to use the term ‘digital capitalism’ to designate the contemporary period dominated by the features of the so-

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<sup>273</sup> In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan had already published now famous books, in which he, among others, discussed “mankind leaving a typographic age and entering an electronic one” and in the book ‘Understanding Media’ he coined the term ‘The Global Village’ to describe the new age of electronic media (Turner 2006, 53).

<sup>274</sup> This included a number of non-scientific publications describing and celebrating Circassian history and culture. Some of these expressed harsh opposition to official Russian history writing and/or managed to offend neighbouring peoples - whether ethnic Russians or those belonging to other Caucasian groups.

<sup>275</sup> Books published by Circassians and other Caucasians in the diaspora countries were also now translated and published in the North Caucasus.

called Web 2.0.<sup>276</sup> This is an updated version of the two preceding periods of print and electronic capitalism, representing a third phase of media technological development. Jürgen Habermas has stressed how only with the arrival of modernism did the printing press “unfold its cultural and political significance”. “It brings with it an enlargement of the communicative action which, by means of electronic mass-communication, as developed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been intensified once more” (Habermas 1996, 366 - my translation).<sup>277</sup> Extending the theory of Benedict Anderson, the current period of digital capitalism could be characterised as yet another period of intensification. This (gradual) shift from electronic towards digital capitalism more than illustrates the role of speed and acceleration in this process. We are witnessing a profound shift in form and practice of mediation since the arrival of Web 2.0, which potentially has significant consequences for memorialisation and mobilisation - as the case of the Circassian revival illustrates.

The shift to digital capitalism experienced since the mid-2000s has contributed significantly to the reproduction and acceleration of the contemporary Circassian cultural revival. Characterised not just by the newfound dominance of the Internet as a media but also the integrated multi-media character of the Internet, with by features such as hyperlinking, remediation, cross-mediality etc. Two main characteristics of the Internet can primarily be emphasised: firstly, the element of convergence of media forms and technologies that is illustrated by, for instance, the integrated use of ‘older’ media forms such as photos and films on social media sites and other parts of the Internet. This is sometimes referred to as ‘new media’ (Manovich 2001). Secondly, the Internet functions as an enormous digital storehouse, as a media form that is technologically based upon a database model (Manovich 2001, 55). These two twin characteristics of the contemporary Internet - or digital capitalism - to a large extent encapsulate the digital aspects of the ongoing Circassian revival.

## **Re-Imagining Circassia**

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to a re-imaging of the Circassian homeland as a key element of ethnic identity, both in the North Caucasus and among the Circassian diaspora - through a number of different processes and forms of expression, including a revival and reproduction of the

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<sup>276</sup> The term ‘digital capitalism’ is also used by Dan Schiller in his book of the same name from 2000, where he mainly investigates the new economic landscape defined by the interface between neo-liberalism and the Internet.

<sup>277</sup> The contemporary phase of digital capitalism is also characterised by a more transnational, global or cosmopolitan outlook compared to the phase of electronic capitalism of the 1990s, which was more state-centric.

‘imaginary geography’ of the nineteenth century, as described earlier in this chapter. Seteney Shami has stated the following regarding the diaspora Circassians and the new role of the homeland: “The encounter with the homeland has brought this space back into time and has made it into a territory” (Shami 1998, 642). Since then the Internet has played a significant role in the process of what could be labelled a virtual ‘re-territorialisation’. This could be labelled ‘iCircassia’, which in many ways is also a way of contesting the situation on the ground in the contemporary Kuban region (formally Krasnodar Krai) and other parts of historical Circassia.

Images of the contemporary homeland - the nature, the people, the traditions, the built environment etc. - are presented on many websites,<sup>278</sup> both in the form of products presented by professional media outlets and as amateur photos and films by tourists and other travellers that have visited the region, including some from the Circassian diaspora.<sup>279</sup> After a slight delay, the Circassians in the homeland now also add to this joint pool of Circassian images, which is increasing on a daily basis.<sup>280</sup> Together with the many examples of remediated nineteenth century representations, these many digital Circassian images constitute a visual virtual version of Circassia.<sup>281</sup> The historical homeland becomes more visible, not just for the members of the dispersed diaspora but also for the rest of the world. A contested European periphery becomes slightly more visible to the rest of Europe.

One of the questions, raised by the emergence of ‘Internet-Circassia’ and the Circassian digital diaspora, is whether this phenomenon will reduce the desire to repatriate among the diaspora. Repatriation is one of the most difficult issues facing the Circassian diaspora organisations, many of which have formally prioritised repatriation since the 1990s.<sup>282</sup> As noted by Khachig Tololyan, the option of performing a virtual ‘return’ - a repeated turning towards the historical homeland through the Internet - could replace or reduce the will to actually repatriate (Gibb 2006, 175). Camilla Gibb has investigated the Harari diaspora, which originates from Ethiopia, including how they “construct, circulate and consume images of the homeland over the Internet”, and this could be relevant to consider in relation to the Circassian experience. “Because, as Appadurai (1995) notes, “The

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<sup>278</sup> Imagology, sometimes referred to as ‘image studies’, is the analysis of the use of national and ethnic stereotypes in literature (and other cultural productions), which is a related way of discussing the production of national or counter-national images - and imagined geographies (Beller and Leerssen 2007).

<sup>279</sup> Tourists are increasingly contributing to the creation of a worldwide digital repository of visual images of places all over the world. Within this worldwide digital archive, Circassian trajectories can increasingly be found.

<sup>280</sup> Including a central role for many of the territorial symbols mentioned earlier, such as the flag, the nineteenth-century costumes, historical maps etc.

<sup>281</sup> These virtual visualisations share similarities with the so-called ‘reversing of the imperial gaze’ described in a number of post-colonial studies, including Edward Said and Derek Gregory. Now this process of reversing has taken on a new form that could be labelled a ‘digital gaze’.

<sup>282</sup> Many of the newer organisations criticise the older organisations for talking about repatriation, while rarely taking concrete steps to push forward an agenda on the issue.

homeland is partly invented, existing only in the imagination of the deterritorialized groups”, the Internet is one place where that imagination can speak in visual, textual and interactive terms” (Gibb 2006, 175). And Gibb further notes that “the loosening of the ties between people and place has fundamentally altered the basis of cultural reproduction” (Gibb 2006, 176). The arrival of the social media of Web 2.0, and the Internet in general, has contributed to enlarging and transnationalising the Circassian civil society sector significantly. Among the Circassian diaspora, this has led to the increased involvement of youths and others with an interest in using the Internet, to a much larger degree than before, in producing, circulating and discussing Circassian content. The Internet has turned out to be a highly appropriate tool for the twin task of mobilising Circassians for action (online as well as offline) and promoting what Gibb refers to as ‘cultural reproduction’. As mentioned, the threatening loss of Circassian language and culture in general is one of the key mobilising factors among the new generation of on- and offline activists. As also noted by Gibb in relation to the Harari, the role of transferring knowledge of history, culture and traditions, which used to be the role of the elders, has today partly been taken over by the Internet.<sup>283</sup> Here, digital activists not only advocate contemporary Circassian issues such as genocide recognition but also promote Circassian identity by taking part in the production and reproduction of a digitalised version of Circassian cultural heritage. All in all, it is obvious that this development has contributed to invigorating the Circassian revival.<sup>284</sup>

There are a number of different ways of practising ‘long-distance relationships’ with a distant, mythologised and mostly unseen homeland among the Circassian diaspora, whether on the part of associations, organisations or individuals. This diversity is also reflected in the five main strands of the contemporary Circassian movement identified by Sufian Zhemukhov as ranging from ‘nationalists’ at one end, through ‘sovereignists’, ‘centrists’ and ‘culturalists’, to ‘accommodationists’ at the other end of the spectrum (Zhemukhov 2012). The nationalist stand is the one most widely discussed, as illustrated by, for instance, Benedict Anderson, who has used the terms ‘mobile nationalism’ or ‘long-distance nationalism’ to discuss the phenomenon of ‘Internet nationalism’ (Conversi 2012, 1361). Here, love of the homeland can grow strong - at a distance - while the homeland is often fetishised, and assimilation into the country of residence can become a form of treason. This is basically an intensification of the already well-known phenomenon of ‘diaspora nationalism’ described by, among others, Anderson (1983/1991), and Schiller and Fouron (2001). Since nationalism only marks one end of the contemporary Circassian movement, albeit

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<sup>283</sup> This has, to some extent, marginalised the elders, though many of these have also relocated to urban settings, where they are often active in various associations. As mentioned elsewhere, the threatening loss of language is an issue that is lamented by many Circassians. This could turn out to be the ‘collateral damage’ of a successful Circassian revival.

<sup>284</sup> Most of the elders that I have met at conferences, in cultural associations and elsewhere have welcomed this trend and often expressed pride in the renewed level of activity. I have not talked to elders in Circassian villages in the Caucasus or, for instance, in Turkey to see whether they have reservations regarding this development.

often the most visible and catchy one for news media in different contexts (used and misused for different purposes by different actors), it could be relevant to include assessments of the other four stands as well in order to achieve a fuller picture of the ‘creation of iCircassia’, although this is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Thomas Hyland Eriksen has also elaborated on the relationship between nationalism and the Internet. He identifies “four varieties of Internet nationalism: State-supported (Chile), surrogate (Afrikaner), pre-independence (Kurdish) and multiculturalist (Moroccan-Dutch)”, which he then supplements with two more, which are not included in his analysis: ‘oppositional’ and diasporic identities with weak links to homeland. (Eriksen 2007, 14).<sup>285</sup> The case of the Circassian Internet revival does not fit easily into any one of the categories but the most visible part of the Circassian activism, focusing on genocide recognition and protesting against the Sochi Olympics, particularly shares similarities with ‘pre-independence’ and ‘opposition’. However, as mentioned above, nationalism is just one aspect of the Circassian revival. Eriksen notes that the Internet is creating “an invisible, but perceptible umbrella covering scattered diasporas in numerous countries” and stresses that, with the arrival of the Internet, a certain form of identity is more likely to persist than before, when “encapsulation or assimilation were the most likely outcome” (Eriksen 2007, 15). This relates to identities such as, for instance, German Circassianness or American Circassianness. In other words, the Internet contributes to the creation of new forms of hybrid identity, and this is relevant to include in an assessment of the Circassian context.

‘Internet-Circassia’ is multi-lingual, though the netizens of iCircassia generally belong to certain linguistically-defined spaces within the virtual part of the Circassian world. However, these spaces are increasingly overlapping. This is partly due to the growing knowledge and use of English and to the rising use - and usability - of Internet-generated functions such as Google Translate. Just a few years ago, iCircassia could be defined as consisting of almost separate linguistically-defined zones, especially Russian, Turkish and Arabic, with English functioning as an addition together with a few other languages. The role of the Circassian language on the Internet has also expanded as a zone that (potentially) cut across the other linguistic zones (as does English also) but a general lack of knowledge of the Cyrillic alphabet is impeding this development. Still, many new possibilities of learning and using the Circassian language through the Internet have evolved and, similarly, the possibilities of linking up to likeminded people have increased. These linguistically-defined zones not only constitute significant parts of iCircassia today but have grown with the arrival of new websites and, in particular, with the growth in social web media. This is a reflection of the diversity

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<sup>285</sup> Anna Everett (2009, 34) has noted that ‘cyber-nationalism’ can potentially challenge ‘old-nationalism’. Cyber-nationalism can thus question fragile balances between groups and potentially lead to conflicts. Such concerns have occasionally been voiced in relation to the Circassian revival.

of the geographically scattered Circassian population which, however, with the growing role of the Internet, is increasingly converging.

As part of the accelerating process of globalisation, minority languages such as Circassian appear to become further marginalised, as ongoing processes over a number of years are further enhanced due to the geographically dispersed nature of the Circassian communities.<sup>286</sup> The Internet is now being used to counter this situation by promoting different forms of language training, for instance through the use of YouTube, where a mixture of pedagogical methods and aural examples can be applied. Whether this will contribute to saving the Circassian language from extinction is questionable, and opinions among Circassian activists differ as to whether language survival should be a key element of the Circassian revival. Still, many Circassians refer to loss of language as a sign of assimilation and loss of culture, and thus as part of their motivation to become active participants in the Circassian revival.<sup>287</sup> It should be noted that, for instance, the relatively few Circassian youth activists among the diaspora that speak the Circassian language evidently command respect from their peers.

Initially, the rather low level of Internet action was not merely due to government control and a lack of access in the Russian North Caucasus and in Turkey but was also due to a lack of equipment and computer and language skills. A digital and linguistic divide still had to be overcome but, both in Turkey and in Russia, this situation is changing quickly, spearheaded by the young generation especially.<sup>288</sup> The increased role of the Internet also increases some of the generally well-known negative side-effects, such as hate-speech, xenophobic or ultra-nationalistic remarks - both towards and by Circassians. A former Circassian diaspora activist referred to 'stupid nationalism', as occurs on the Internet, as a demotivating factor for him. This element has increased with the growing role of the Russian Internet sphere in the Circassian revival - xenophobic tendencies are widespread in Russia, and the Internet has proven to be a significant field of xenophobic clashes. The widespread xenophobic attitude towards Caucasians in Russia, which also unfolds on the Internet, similarly affects the Circassian Internet context.

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<sup>286</sup> A large part of the Circassians lived on the Anatolian mainland for more than six generations but during recent decades, they have experienced a secondary displacement, albeit this time mainly voluntarily. A new generation of Circassians now dwells in Istanbul, Ankara or in large urban conurbation in Germany, Holland, Belgium etc. and, to many of those Circassians, regions in Central Anatolia have become a second lost homeland.

<sup>287</sup> The fear of assimilation can be seen, for instance, in Turkey, where a large number of young Circassians have lost the Circassian language that their forefathers had managed to keep alive for six or seven generations in exile. This is an illustration of one of the contradictions of late modern globalisation whereby Turkish as a daily language in the main urban centres, in the media and in education has achieved a more dominant position than before, while English is increasingly becoming the second language.

<sup>288</sup> As noted by John Phillip Schaefer in his discussion of 'iGhana': "Literacy is again required, and a computer literacy is now prerequisite. There is thus a digital divide that challenges the role of electronic capitalism in the formation of an imagined community of the nation-state" (Schaefer 2006, 211).

The following three examples illustrate the diversity of Internet-Circassia, while also demonstrating the (increasing) level of connectedness that is one of the key characteristics of the Internet. Firstly, the use of viral videos: short films or video clips that can instantly be shared through all web-based media platforms and which have often been inexpensively produced.<sup>289</sup> These are now regularly produced and circulated by a number of organisations in relation to the annual May 21 events, both for online promotion of events and for use at the commemorative events, conferences etc. These videos are often short (for instance 2, 5 or 10 minutes long) and may be in local languages but often with a visual representation that can be understood without knowing the actual words uttered in the video. The content often includes historical images from the nineteenth century, digitalised and/or remediated for use in these videos, which can also be used to inform wider target groups about Circassian history and identity after these events. The form of the video often varies from year to year - one example of a different format is a viral video made by the youth activists at the Circassian Cultural Institute in New Jersey in May 2011, in which they filmed each other while telephoning the Russian embassy in Washington, all asking the same question: “Where is Circassia?” The form varies greatly, however, as organisations are becoming increasingly aware that they should not use the same formula from year to year. Viral videos are typically uploaded onto YouTube and further circulated through sites such as Facebook and Twitter, not just by organisations but also by individuals. These sites have become important supplements to the websites of the Circassian and Caucasian organisations and other initiatives and, in some cases, the main activities have moved to the social sites. Viral videos have become a new tool for civil society actions and campaigns, one that is cheap and easy to use, as illustrated by the Circassian activists, many of whom form part of an organisation. Their role is crucial as facilitators (initiating and maintaining) of the processes of sharing and connecting - partly related to what Malcolm Gladwell - in a slightly different context - has called ‘influencers’ (Jenkins 2009).<sup>290</sup> Obviously, a number of different forms of cyber-activism can be anticipated to emerge in the (near) future.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> On the use of viral videos as part of (viral) campaigning (Obama for President), see Kevin Wallsten (2010).

<sup>290</sup> Gladwell has analysed the functioning of social networks or media including how and when certain cultural phenomena go viral. He uses the terms ‘connectors’ and ‘mavens’ to assign key persons or actors, where the latter represents persons with knowledge and information, and the former those with large networks that enable them to circulate information and knowledge (Gladwell 2002).

<sup>291</sup> As stated by Wallsten (2010, 163) in relation to the “Yes We Can” campaign of the American elections in 2008, these actors “seem to occupy a unique and influential position in determining whether an online political video goes viral”.

In 2009, new transnational cooperation began among a number of leading Circassian and Caucasian organisations of the post-2005 generation. This was centred on cooperation, coordinated action and exchange of promotional material (slogans, poster design), videos etc., as illustrated by the May21.org site. Since 2010, May21.org opened a YouTube channel (as ‘may211864’), where some of the viral videos from the campaign can still be seen (3 videos as of 20-06-2012). Many videos documenting the May 21 actions in various places around the world can also be seen (18 videos as of 20-06-2013), along with a large number of digital photos (that can also be found on a number of other sites).<sup>292</sup> These organisations, along with a few more, are also part of the parallel initiative, NoSochi2014.org. NoSochi is a topic that has increasingly achieved a central position in May 21 events and initiatives. A NoSochi2014 YouTube channel was opened in 2010 and, by July 2013, it was showing ten videos that had been played more than 23,000 times. On YouTube in general, there are more than a hundred films on Circassians and ‘May 21’ (10-07-2013), most of which cover events such as demonstrations, commemorative ceremonies, conferences (of different lengths and detail), while a smaller number of films use ‘May 21’ in the title or subtitle of films on Circassian history and identity. These can be seen on the YouTube channel of May21.org, where activists and others are encouraged to do the same in their national contexts. This film was presented in negative, which adds visual drama to the story. In 2010, they presented a film that also featured activists (15 persons) being asked “What is your message to other Circassians?” These are both examples of the use of a contemporary format that avoids nineteenth-century images, and which could perhaps be considered more appealing to contemporary cosmopolitan youth activists. A related example is the film from May 2013 made by representatives of the Caucasian Forum from Turkey and also circulated via the May21.org YouTube channel as well as their website, Facebook site etc. (in Turkish with English subtitles).

The number ‘21’ has become an icon - also a visual icon - of the Circassian revival (CR2), NART-TV produced a 61-minute-long documentary entitled ‘21’ (with the subtitle “The Circassian tale of suffering and pain”) based on a dialogue with a Circassian researcher, interviewed in Circassian and Arabic (with subtitles in English).<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> By July 2013, the ‘May211864’ YouTube channel had been viewed more than 28,000 times.

<sup>293</sup> Nart TV is a Circassian satellite TV station that began as a voluntary project in Jordan in 2007 but now also has branches in two Circassian republics in Russia. Its aim is to promote the use and preservation of the Circassian language and many of its broadcasts are in the Circassian language.



A significant number of short (and longer) videos on Circassian history and identity have been produced and circulated on YouTube by organisations as well as by individuals. These generally rather simple vernacular film productions mostly reproduce visual representations of the Circassian exodus from the Caucasus in the nineteenth century - a large part of which are the same images that have achieved iconographic status in the Circassian revival. Many of these images had already been reproduced in books and other publications but with the arrival of the Internet - and not least the contemporary second-generation - these images have been digitalised, remediated and circulated to a much larger degree.<sup>294</sup> YouTube video clips are also used to promote other cultural products such as the films 'Cherkess' (2010) and 'Homeland' (2013). The making of these films, could in both cases, be followed during the years of production, which generated an increased interest among the Circassian or Caucasian audience. This illustrates the potential interconnectedness of Web 2.0 and its usability as a tool in campaigning, which can have wider or different aims than just promoting a product such as a film.

One of the strengths of the video as a media type is, according to Bonnie Nardi, its potential to generate affinity or "feelings of connection between peoples" and this can establish a form of social bonding (Lange 2009, 73).<sup>295</sup>

According to Snickars, YouTube has become the world's largest archive and we are still in the early phases of investigating how this will affect cultural memory in general (Snickars 2009, 293). The significant Circassian use of YouTube indicates, however, that this has become a significant platform for media productions and one that is regarded as important in order to reach the relevant audiences. Snickars refers to the archive as "a kind of guiding metaphor for the contemporary digital landscape", which includes not just YouTube but also Flickr, Instagram and others (Snickars 2009, 303). As stated by Lawrence Lessig, YouTube can be understood as a kind of "community space" - "a virtual place where people interact, share information or interests" (Snickars 2009, 309). Still, for instance, the NoSochi2014 YouTube videos and channels generate a number of hostile and xenophobic comments, some of which have been marked as 'spam'.

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<sup>294</sup> See appendix for examples of websites.

<sup>295</sup> A classical example of YouTube-generated vernacular memorialisation are the videos commemorating deceased individuals, as also noted by Wahlberg (2009, 218).

Many of the above-mentioned YouTube videos represent what could be labelled YouTubian memorialisation, which is a relatively new genre that includes individual as well as collective remembrance produced on a vernacular basis on a low budget (see Chapter 5.1 of this thesis on May 21, 1864). In the case of the Circassian vernacular YouTubian videos, they often consist mainly of nineteenth-century images such as still photos, paintings, maps, illustrations from books, museum items etc. that are filmed in different ways (e.g. zooming in on details) and then cut into a short film. When these videos are shown at commemorative events such as May 21<sup>st</sup> or at conferences - often accompanied by sad Circassian folk songs, often laments related to the exodus - it often leads to emotional responses from the audience. Whether this form of affective response also is taking place when audiences are alone in front of the computer screen is difficult to assess. Anyway, YouTubian memorialisation has become a significant cultural genre within the contemporary Circassian revival (CR2) and the number of 'memory-entrepreneurs', to use a term from James E. Young, has increased many times.

A second example comes from the Circassian activists from New Jersey who use the term 'Facebook revolution' in reference to the new *modus operandi* they have adopted since the arrival of Facebook.<sup>296</sup> Here, new linking opportunities ('likes' or 'friends') - sometimes transnational, sometimes national or even local - are used by the activists to develop further relationships and exchange information and knowledge.<sup>297</sup> This can function as a negotiation on how to define Circassian culture and identity that can be performed both openly and publicly, making it possible for others to participate, or can be performed just between two individuals. This is an example of a method that can be used to strengthen an understanding of the Circassian exile as genocide, and perhaps engage new cyber-activists who can continue these promotional efforts through the continued process of sharing within their networks. This process has been labelled a 'thickening' of networks (linking, developing dense networks, thickening networking) and can now become a strategy of Internet-based activism.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> The young activists meet in the offices of the Circassian Cultural Institute (CCI) two or three times a week and perform these actions jointly - so the social offline face-to-face aspect still seems important and can be motivating for this type of activism. They have presented themselves on YouTube via the video "Behind the scenes at the Circassian Cultural Institute".

<sup>297</sup> CCI also has its own YouTube channel with 13 videos as of July 2013, most of which consist of hour-long filmed presentations by lecturers.

<sup>298</sup> Valtysson has analysed whether Facebook "represents a colonizing mediatization of the lifeworld" or whether it represents an 'emancipation' or 'empowerment' as 'digital cultures' or 'networked publics' can use Facebook to reach audiences and set agendas (Valtysson 2012).

Thirdly, the promotion of genocide recognition, which is a topic addressed in both of the two former examples of viral videos and the 'Facebook revolution'. Archives have been researched, results digitalised and made available on websites such as [circassian-genocide.info](http://circassian-genocide.info) where, for instance, documents from Russian and Georgian archives are presented.<sup>299</sup> This is a process still in its early phases and much more archive material can be expected to be made available in the very near future, some of which is already available in books. Digitalised testimonies from various nineteenth-century sources are also published on the [Circassian-genocide.info](http://Circassian-genocide.info) site including newspaper reports, Russian army reports, letters from Circassians etc.; these or similar testimonies are regularly circulated on the Internet in relation to May 21 events.

Perhaps the most important aspect of these examples is how they show an increasing tendency towards linking (hyperlinking). Connectivity and spreadability, to use a term from Henry Jenkins (2009), play a significant part in all these examples.<sup>300</sup>

## **Discussion: Digital Mediation**

The digital shift marked by the second generation Internet, signified especially by the interactive elements of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, has resulted in a radically new use of the media - both in terms of form, content and utilization. According to Kraidy and Mourad, the emerging global media environment can best be understood as a transnational "hypermedia space", which includes terms such as media convergence, remediation, cross-mediality, intermediality, hyperlinking, interactivity etc., whereby older forms of media can be combined with new ones in a number of different combinations (Kraidy and Mourad 2010, 1; Livingston 2009, 3; [cross-mediacom.dk](http://cross-mediacom.dk)). This includes, for instance, "the move from photography to its digital recycling" (Huyssen 2000, 9). Kraidy and Mourad analysed the role of social media and mobile telephones in civil society actions and demonstrations in Lebanon in 2005 and in Iran in 2009

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<sup>299</sup> For instance, the book 'The Circassian Genocide' by the American historian Walter Richmond is already - partly at least - one of the results of the recently researched and digitalised archival documents. As stressed by Cohen and Rosenzweig, the 'new digital history' will provide space for both contemporary and historical voices - for instance minority voices - that otherwise would not have surfaced (Cohen and Rosenzweig 2006, 248). They outline seven qualities of digital media and network that could potentially improve the work of historians (Cohen and Rosenzweig 2006, 3).

<sup>300</sup> Jenkins has applied the notion of 'gift economy' to explain spreadability - especially in relation to Twitter (retweeting etc.).

which, in many ways, formed a prelude to the Arab Spring from early 2011.<sup>301</sup> They concluded that: “Hypermedia space’s importance resides in the ways in which it combines mobility, interactivity and visibility. We can now glimpse the contours of a theory of hypermedia in which mobile activists interactively activate inter-media configurations that connect media old and new, gaining visibility for their cause through a hypermedia space that is less controllable than social space and therefore potentially subversive of the prevalent mode of governance.” (Kraidy and Mourad 2010, 11). Kraidy and Mourad here point at some of the key reasons why further elaborations of ‘hypermedia space’ are relevant to discuss in relation to digital capitalism. For instance, key issues of hypermedia space such as remediation and circulation in combination illustrate how digital media is particular relevant and useful for a process of mobilisation, where mediated memorialisation plays a key role (Himpele 2008, 15; van Dijck 2007, 49).

Some argue that the new hypermedia space has ultimately not managed to affect the end results of actions but, on the other hand, some of the successful actions and events during the Arab Spring demonstrate that some results have been achieved (Kraidy and Mourad 2010, 15). Whatever the outcome - an empowerment and mobilisation of civil society actors has taken place. This is a type of empowerment that can be applied in different ways in years to come. The civil society actions of a peripherally located Caucasian minority group cannot, however, expect support from potential civil society partners in the central parts of Russia. Various human rights groups might support the rights of the Circassians but are generally fully employed in documenting various forms of human rights violations while simultaneously under pressure from the authorities. The Circassian scenario is therefore quite different from that of the countries of the Arab Spring, and the new potential for linking Circassians in the homeland and the diaspora may turn out to be a difficult balancing act, in which local Circassians could be accused by Russia of being disloyal citizens.

Diaspora groups often constitute a specific interface within the contemporary discussions on mediation, and this is reflected in the term ‘digital diaspora’, which often entails new forms of community building. As a field of study, this has become a meeting point between migration and media studies, and has inspired parts of this thesis. (See below on the V.E.R.A.city loop model).

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<sup>301</sup> Post-Soviet examples of similar processes of civil society mobilisation include, for instance, Moldova, April 2009 and Russia, December 2011 ([www.russiablog.org](http://www.russiablog.org) 17-04-2009).

Cyberspace can function as a space for identity negotiation which can be both qualitatively and quantitatively different from earlier forms of mediation. In relation to such negotiations, identity can be put into practise differently from in offline communities of, for instance, Circassian associations, where people tend to come for cultural activities such as dance lessons, to play a game of chess, to speak Circassian etc. (Brinkerhoff 2009, 57). This can lead to the establishment of cyber-communities: “The interactive components of the Internet enable the creation of cyber-communities that connect dispersed populations and provide solidarity among members” (Brinkerhoff 2009, 14). This corresponds to the experiences of the sprawling Circassian Internet community, though it should be noted that this community is highly heterogeneous and consists of a number of sub-communities.<sup>302</sup> Brinkerhoff further concludes on the potential functionalities that: “The Internet may be an essential repository of information about the homeland, providing opportunities to continuously educate subsequent diaspora generations, as well as more general publics” (Brinkerhoff 2009, 57).<sup>303</sup> This is an illustration of why the Internet can potentially function as a powerful tool in relation to the processes of both memorialisation and mobilisation, which I investigate in relation to the ongoing Circassian revival process. It also illustrates one of the key differences between the phases of ‘electronic capitalism’ and ‘digital capitalism’.

According to Jeff D. Himpele: “...Martin-Barbero argues that the ‘mediation’ of transnational media in circulation has meant an upsurge of new cultural identities and practises, the anthropology of media has elaborated on mediation as a fundamental constituent of social and cultural reproduction” (Himpele 2008, 11). The kind of ‘upsurge in new cultural identities and practices’ described by Jesus Martin-Barbero corresponds with the Circassian context - especially as mediated and unfolding on the Internet. Himpele has further concluded that the important role of media in relation to indigenous revival (Himpele, 199)<sup>304</sup> - is what he refers to as ‘techniques of empowerment’ (Himpele, 212). According to Himpele, the indigenous media producers in this process asserted control over the circulation of Indianness.<sup>305</sup> This, in many ways, corresponds with

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<sup>302</sup> For instance, the discussions in relation to a Facebook group or a YouTube video can be quite different from the more internal discussions on the forums of the websites of Circassian organisations.

<sup>303</sup> More on the role of the ‘total archive’, the ‘repository of information’ and the ‘database character’ of the Internet in relation to the discussion of memorialisation later.

<sup>304</sup> Also on how in Bolivia - through media, tourism etc. - the term ‘indigenous’ came to be connoted with the national past (Himpele 2008, 199).

<sup>305</sup> Much of the Circassian revival is about recognition of Circassian history and identity as part of a larger Caucasianness. This can also be seen as a way of challenging the Caucasianness that Russia is building in relation to the Sochi Olympics where historical authenticity is promoted through the connections to historical Greece (through archaeological excavations, legend of Prometheus and Fisht Mountains (name of the Olympic stadium, where

Circassian experiences, although the degree of empowerment obviously differs in different Circassian contexts. Russia constitutes a complex federal context in which issues of domination, but also of competition and resistance, unfold. Still, the process of reproduction and circulation of Circassian indigenusness takes place on a number of different levels - especially on the Internet. In a Russian context, it is relevant to discuss the potential differences between state-supported mediation and sub-state level processes taking place in the North Caucasians republics, where actors such as the Circassian organisations and their representatives are facing different kinds of possibilities and barriers.

One of the paradoxes of Internet use by diaspora and other forms of migrant groups is that, on the one hand, the world has witnessed an interlinked de-territorialisation through the Internet and electronic mass media that can float freely across state borders while, on the other, this de-territorialised digital media can be used to perform acts of virtual re-territorialisation.

Fred Turner states the following conclusion on the development of the Internet: “I conclude by arguing that Brand’s entrepreneurial tactics, and the now widespread association of computers and computer-mediated communication with the egalitarian social ideals of the counterculture, have become important features of an increasingly networked mode of living, working, and deploying social and cultural power” (Turner 2006, 9). Turner also quotes the Mondo 2000 magazine with the following statement: “Digital technologies had inherited the transformational mantle of the counterculture” (Turner 2006, 164).<sup>306</sup>

According to an investigation by the BBC, by 2010 four out of five people worldwide regarded it as a fundamental human right to be able to access the Internet.<sup>307</sup> People in from from Mexico, Brazil and Turkey particularly supported this statement.<sup>308</sup> According to the General Secretary of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Hamadoun Toure: “The right to communicate cannot be ignored.” And he further underlines the fact that: “The Internet is potentially the most

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opening/closing ceremonies will take place)), and not through the local indigenous populations as in Vancouver and Sydney.

<sup>306</sup> Turner also refers to cyberspace as an ‘electronic frontier’.

<sup>307</sup> Politiken.dk (09-03-2010).

<sup>308</sup> 27,000 adults in 26 countries were questioned.

powerful source to enlightenment ever created”.<sup>309</sup> Toure further states that governments around the world should view the Internet as a fundamental part of infrastructure similar to roads and water.<sup>310</sup>

The tendencies outlined above underline the relevance of discussing the four main elements of Maximillian Forte’s analytical model on Internet-mediated indigenous revival, the so-called V.E.R.A.city loop, which I find relevant to include in the discussion of the Circassian case.

‘V.E.R.A.’ stands for visibility, embodiment, recognition and authenticity - these four themes are linked in a continuous loop-function as new material is constantly produced and presented on the Internet. A loop of processes whereby “online visibility [is] helping to virtually embody groups who might not otherwise be noticed or distinguished and who - given this virtualized visibility and embodiment - subsequently gain recognition from prospective allies and brokers. Depending upon the reputation of one’s ally, the fact of being recognised itself adds authenticity to a particular, previously under-recognised group’s claims” to ‘real indigeneity’ (Forte 2006, 146).

The role of visibility must be said to be obvious, as also illustrated by the many references in this and other chapters (see appendix). Visualisation does not just include images and films but also all sorts of written documents from historical archives and other written texts. This visualisation also represents a virtual embodiment of Circassianness (Circassian history and identity): “The Internet also helps to *embody* groups facing difficulties in gaining offline acceptance as ‘indigenous’” (Forte 2006, 146). Thirdly, recognition, as also stressed by Linda T. Smith, who states that ‘recovery’ (of territories; indigenous rights; and histories) is also subject “to recognition that indigenous cultures have changed inexorably” (Smith 1999, 116). It is this kind of recognition that the Circassian activists are advocating for and that the increasing amount of historical and cultural documentation on the Internet helps to generate. Upon visiting a number of Circassian places around the world, interviewing and reading (including on the Internet), it is my conclusion that ‘recognition’ is the one word or term that most clearly encompasses the aims of the diverse Circassian revival(s). Fourthly, this recognition contributes to providing “further authority and authenticity to any given group in its respective offline context(s)” (Forte 2006, 146).<sup>311</sup> Forte argues that it is through this process that

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<sup>309</sup> Politiken.dk (09-03-2010).

<sup>310</sup> The survey also included criticism of various kinds, including the possibilities for presenting violent content, for becoming a new field of criminal activity, for government censorship etc.

<sup>311</sup> Authenticity as fundamental to creating and sustaining a brand: for instance, regional or national belonging. Or, on a different level: cheese production in Circassian parts of the North Caucasus as demonstrated to tourists and then sold.

the V.E.R.A.city of “indigeneity is sought and attained by electronic means of promotion” (Forte 2006, 146).

As indicated on several occasions, the Circassian revival is not just virtual or only unfolding in cyberspace. Offline civil society initiatives have, to a very large extent, been initiating and driving the Circassian revival process forward. However, the arrival of the Internet, which has been a gradual and slow process in many areas of Circassian residence, has offered a new dimension to the revival, as it has extended and accelerated this process.<sup>312</sup>

The high number of Circassian websites marks a significant change in a process of mediated Circassian revival that, in a Russian context, began in the 1990s in the North Caucasian republics through other media forms. Many Internet sites now represent a counter-narrative or resistance to the official Russian version of history, and share similarities with post-colonial actions and protests in other post-imperial settings. As noted in the Black Book of Colonialism, the Russian Federation of today constitutes a surprising imperial successor state, one that does not accept or recognise its former status (Ferro 2005). The Internet has become a space in which such inconsistencies can be pointed at, discussed and possibly used in a campaign for alternative versions based on documentation, as seen in the case of the Circassian revival. This type of mediated resistance has regularly been analysed within literature, media and cultural studies, although often with a focus on ‘high culture’ as also illustrated by, for instance, Edward Said. The ongoing mediated and remediated Circassian revival illustrates the use of a variety of media tools to conduct what could, perhaps, be labelled a vernacular (post-)colonial encounter. In conducting these kinds of call for a reassessment of the history of the Russian Empire, the Circassians are part of a trend found among several of the peoples of the Caucasus as well as several of the countries of the former Soviet Union.

## Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, then, there is a need to update the term ‘electronic capitalism’ to ‘digital capitalism’ - or ‘digital mediation’ - in order to encompass the increasingly widespread, fast and accessible

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Authenticity is in the combination between marketing and regional branding thought to be the decisive element. Regional branding can include an element of counter-branding vis-à-vis the dominant nation branding.

<sup>312</sup> Until the mid-2000s Circassian civil society was largely dominated by cultural associations and primarily focussed on cultural or folkloristic issues. The wars in Abkhazia and Chechnya in the 1990s marked an initial mobilisation among Circassians in Turkey. Another significant precursor to the present revival was the establishment of Caucasian foundations which, due to an option in Turkish legislation for establishing philanthropic foundations, had been involved since the 1950s in preserving and collecting Circassian archival material, thereby establishing important and unique book collections.



Internet, with its increased interactive functions and social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. In addition, the increased role of mobile communication units and the database nature of the Internet signifies a fundamental difference vis-à-vis other forms of media. The products of both electronic and digital capitalism are often highly visual. Websites are visual and visualisation plays a key role.<sup>313</sup> As noted by Schaefer, there is an “extensive representational power of the online universe” (Schaefer 2006, 213). This element of visualisation that is so prominent on Circassian websites also illustrates the importance attributed to authenticity and recognition through the presentation of different forms of historical documentation, especially from the nineteenth century.<sup>314</sup> It should be noted that this includes not only the sources sympathetic to the Circassians in the nineteenth century but also other voices, including those who believed in the brutal implementation of an enforced civilising mission (‘they may have died in the process but we have built new roads...’). This includes, for instance, the memoirs of Russian army officers, some of whom express their pride in winning the war through extreme methods. These today function to enhance the understanding of a highly unjust colonisation that could be labelled as an attempt at genocide.

The most important features of digital capitalism or mediation compared to earlier forms of publishing can be summed up as: the arrival of the social media of Web 2.0, the database nature, the hypermedia character, the hyperlinking options, the interactive features of social media, the low-cost production options, the arrival of new and cheaper mobile user and producer units. Jointly, all of this signifies the increased diversity of media, mediation and remediation that constitutes the strongly mediated Circassian post-2005 revival (CR2).

It could be argued that iCircassia has become a significant part of the Circassian World, often referred to among Circassians as consisting of fifty places (or spaces) of residence around the world. However, iCircassia cannot merely be labelled the fifty-first Circassian place. It could be argued that the Circassian World no longer consists of simply the sum of the homeland and the diaspora Circassians but today also includes iCircassia - in spite of the fact that all the netizens of iCircassia belong to the two former categories as well. What makes iCircassia a new and independent addition to the Circassian World is that this is not just a medium of communication but simultaneously a network of links between different Circassian offline places that might otherwise not have been connected. It is also a large repository of knowledge which, through digitalisation, has become available to Circassians around the world as well as to everybody else. All of this digitalised knowledge is not only available but also shared, used, discussed and reproduced through the aforementioned features of linking and communicating. All in all, iCircassia is more than just a

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<sup>313</sup> See Appendix for examples illustrating the role of ‘visual culture’.

<sup>314</sup> See Appendix for examples: Maps, Drawings/Paintings, Documents

global network - it is also a social network with large databases of knowledge attached, much of which is not otherwise available to offline Circassians (and others) and which is regularly being brought to use in the ongoing Circassian revival. This illustrates how the Internet can function as an integrating medium for both mobilisation and memorialisation.

The Internet has become a space for the reproduction of cultural traditions and history - representations of Circassian culture - that is also a tool that can reach out to large audiences, including beyond the Caucasus, to other Caucasians or to the Circassians that reside as geographically dispersed groups in many different states around the world.

Circassia and the Circassians were recorded in many of the initial printed representations of the Russian nation and empire in the mid-nineteenth century as a wild frontier region in need of civilisation by an expanding modern European empire. The competition with Great Britain, however, generated competing printed representations of Circassia in the West - albeit still in an Orientalist manner. These representations described a nation with a number of prerequisites for becoming a modern nation-state. These competing versions of Circassian history are now presented as documentation, recycled and reproduced on the Internet in a number of different forms.

The Internet is an arena for the return of geography (Hooson 1994, 134), for the return of history (Henze and Enders Wimbush), for contested spaces (Smith 1999, 50) and for contested histories (Smith 1999, 33) - all post-1991 statements that are of relevance to the situation in homeland Circassia in the North Caucasus as well as the diaspora. And relevant too for virtual Circassia, as found on the Internet today. Scattered and dissimilar, but with a number of key elements jointly constituting a virtual territorial identity.

'iCircassia' is represented by a strongly increased presentation of extremely visible elements of a thus far often more uncertain or distant homeland. Suddenly there is an archive, a museum, a library - always available, always open, always accessible - and, perhaps most importantly, constantly made relevant by the news items regularly posted on the front page. How all of these efforts will affect the future production and reproduction of Circassian identity remains to be seen, although the distance between the homeland and diaspora Circassians appears to be slowly diminishing.

The Internet has increased Circassian visibility through a combination of different forms of media (electronic, digital, texts, images, films etc.), including interactive options for (transnational) communication. Jointly, all these new forms of media, with easier access for both users and

producers compared to previously, could be labelled as a new - and additional - language of nationhood for the Circassians.<sup>315</sup>

“Virtual nations are patterned on existing national, yet with different modes of interaction and representation” (Schaefer 2006). ‘iCircassia’ is an imagined community that contain a number of the same features that most modern nations and ethnic groups - in spite of diverging power implications - and ‘iCircassia’ still is a relatively new accomplishment of transnational endeavours among the geographically scattered Circassians. Precisely how ‘iCircassia’ should be represented is a constantly ongoing discussion and a dynamic process including an ever increasing number of people.

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<sup>315</sup> Inspired by Camilla Gibb (2006).

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## **PART IV**

### **The Mediated Memorialisation and Mobilisation: The Triangle of the Circassian Revival:**

**May 21, 1864;  
Genocide Recognition;  
2014 Sochi Winter Olympics**

## *Chapter 7*

### **The role of ‘1864’ and ‘May 21’ in the Contemporary Circassian Revival**

The year 1864 plays a key role in the ongoing Circassian revival as a symbolic representation of the forced exile from the Caucasus that a number of Circassian actors, since 2005, have attempted to get recognised as an act of genocide.<sup>316</sup> The year 1864 also plays a key role in relation to another issue that has generated increased Circassian mobilisation, namely the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics that will take place in the historical homeland of the Circassians in the year when they mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the forced exile. Both of these recent examples of the use of 1864 as a symbol of the Circassian forced exile or genocide can be seen as an extension of the increasingly ‘institutionalised’ use of the year 1864 as a central part of the annual May 21 commemoration events that have steadily gained support since the fall of the Soviet Union.<sup>317</sup> This day is now commemorated in many Circassian spaces around the world with an increasing number of participants, and this is further enhanced through the use of the Internet. This has played a role in engaging an increasing number of young people in the Circassian revival. I argue that, in this process, ‘May 21, 1864’ has increasingly been seen as the defining moment in Circassian history and identity.<sup>318</sup>

In 1864, May 21 was the day when the Russian Empire celebrated its victory over Circassians with army parades at the location of the final victory in the Kbaada valley, where today’s Krasnaya Polyana is located; this was marked by the issuing of medals of honour. The victory parades and medals were a marking of the final Russian conquest of the Caucasus, which had involved hundreds

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<sup>316</sup> The initial version of this chapter was a conference paper on the role of ‘1864’ in the history of the Caucasus (Istanbul, December 2010).

<sup>317</sup> See Appendix for visual representations.

<sup>318</sup> A strong tradition of war memorialisation was institutionalised during the Soviet period, when the historical truth was dictated by the leadership only. This has resulted in a variety of - often conflicting - discourses on the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the post-Soviet states. In Russia, history has become part of the routine of the ruling political party, United Russia, as they place a high number of memorial plates on houses where heroes of the Second World War lived. Simultaneously, most of Europe has also experienced a memory boom since the First World War – a war that resulted in more than 60,000 monuments in Britain and France alone.



of thousands of officers and soldiers, many losing their lives in the Caucasus.<sup>319</sup> The war had taken much longer and had required far greater losses than anticipated, and this had angered both the Tsar and the generals, though the losses among the Circassians and the other indigenous peoples were comparatively much greater. This kind of celebration was repeated in 1914 on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary but, since then, the commemoration of this date has apparently switched towards the victims, such as the Circassians, Abkhazians etc.<sup>320</sup> In the words of Circassian author Amjad Jaimoukha in stark contrast to the 1914 celebrations “the luckless Circassians had to wait 76 more years to observe the bleak day” (Jaimoukha 2001, 70).

The role of Sochi as a symbol - or a site of memory - of the lost Circassian homeland is based on the location here of the last Circassian parliament of rest-Circassia, which was established in 1861 with the main purpose of reorganising the armed Circassian resistance. This last version of Circassia in the nineteenth century consisted of the last three Circassian tribes along the Black Sea coast and lasted until 1864 (Jaimoukha 2001, 67).<sup>321</sup> This is an example of knowledge that had long been lost to many Circassians, perhaps especially among the diaspora, but which now functions as eye-opening understanding with a strong potential for mobilisation that can easily be circulated to others through the Internet.<sup>322</sup> This is partly why the 2014 Sochi Olympics have managed to generate so much new activity among the Circassians - as exemplified particularly by the Circassian organisations and Internet-based initiatives.

Various forms of commemoration that included a key role for the year 1864 and the date May 21 had already begun among the Circassians in the North Caucasus during the late Perestroika years of the final period of the Soviet Union (Derluguian 2005). This materialised, for instance, in the form of the publication of new books on the forced exile of the Circassians, including the translation of books that had never been hitherto published or distributed. New organisations were established and also began to publicly promote an understanding of the forced exile of the Circassians that had not been possible before - including the use of a new term: the Circassian Genocide. Perhaps more than

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<sup>319</sup> Such as, for instance, the monument to Tsarina Katharina in Krasnodar and in other towns, which are used by Cossacks for annual commemorations. This includes monuments to General Yermolov and others in the regions of Krasnodar or Stavropol.

<sup>320</sup> As an alternative to 'May 21, 1864' Russia has officially chosen to focus on 1557 as the year of voluntary unification between the Circassians and Russia, which was celebrated widely in Russia in 2007.

<sup>321</sup> This included sending a delegation to Britain to seek support, which did not materialise in spite of “public enthusiasm” (Jaimoukha 2001, 67).

<sup>322</sup> As stated by a youth activist from New Jersey in a promotional (viral) video in relation to May 21 event: “Read, read, read”.

anything else, this process of beginning to assign May 21 as the joint Circassian day of mourning has promoted an understanding of 1864 as the key year in modern Circassian identity - as the defining moment (Huttenbach 1995, 673).<sup>323</sup> This was the beginning of a process of gradually institutionalising May 21 as the most significant annual event among Circassians worldwide and a priority issue among many Circassian and Caucasian organisations - in the Caucasus as well as in many diaspora countries.<sup>324</sup> In a post-Soviet understanding, the tradition began in Nalchik in Kabardino-Balkaria as a response to the launch of a joint Balkar Day of Mourning in March 1990.<sup>325</sup> A year later, on May 21, a large international Circassian congress was held in Nalchik at which what later became the International Circassian Association was established. One of the key individuals in the Circassian movement, Professor Yuri Shanibov (Musa Shanib<sup>326</sup>) from Nalchik, refers to this meeting in 1991 as the most significant of all May 21's: "This was a glorious and joyful event, when Circassians who were born and grew up in different countries of the world embraced one another as brothers with tears in their eyes".<sup>327</sup>

Some of the inspiration came from similar processes among Armenians, where 1915 (and genocide) became the defining moment in a process partly driven by diaspora elites. Shared conditions: both tragedies took place in the imperial borderland between Russia and the Ottoman Empire; both have large and dispersed exiled groups (though the European location of more Armenians appear to have increased their politicisation); shared experiences of totalitarian or authoritarian regimes during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (where both states authorized ideologically motivated (though sometimes shifting) history writing that significantly restricted the rights of ethnic minorities). When Armenia became an independent nation-state in 1991 this defining moment was formally recognised and commemorated in different ways as a state-endorsed issue.<sup>328</sup>

Among the diaspora in Turkey and other diaspora countries, May 21 has also increasingly become an annual day of mourning, marked in different ways with ceremonies and gatherings, sometimes

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<sup>323</sup> The potential power of a 'genocide recognition agenda' is apparent from the statements of Tony Kushner (and others) that the Holocaust constitutes the defining moment of the 20th century (Kushner 2004, 254).

<sup>324</sup> Yuri Shanibov refers to 'Clarion - May 21 1961' as the beginning of the tradition (CircassianWorld.com May 2009).

<sup>325</sup> This took place as part of the generally accelerated processes of ethno-national resistance to Soviet power during the late Perestroika period. This type of pattern of action-reaction became typical of the period - as seen, for instance, in relation to the mobilisation of Balkars and Kabardians in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria.

<sup>326</sup> The Circassian version of his name. Shanibov is the Russianised version.

<sup>327</sup> CircassianWorld.com (May 2009). Shanibov has been the subject of an interesting - and somewhat patronising - book entitled "Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus" by Georgi M. Derluguian.

<sup>328</sup> The role of the Circassians in the Armenian genocide is a different matter. The Circassians were geostrategically located by the Ottoman authorities as a form of buffer vis-a-vis the Armenian areas in central Anatolia.

including conferences and other forms of information and knowledge dissemination. For a number of years, the most significant Circassian commemorative event in Turkey was held at the Kefken caves on the Black Sea coast, not far from Istanbul, which was one of the first places Circassians found refuge when they arrived in 1864. These annual events, organised on a national level by Kaffed, the Federation of Caucasian Associations in Turkey, managed to attract an increasing number of people for an emotional ceremony consisting of a long row of hundreds of people holding torches as the sun set (Bullough 2010, 31). The popularity of this event was also due to the spectacular location and the beauty of the flaming torches, which contributed to making the event an emotional experience. When this annual event was cancelled from 2011 on, it was officially due to the security risks as the event had become so popular that it was difficult to find space for all participants along the rocky and steep coastline. Others have stated that this change was due to the fact that Istanbul had become the key scene of May 21 events in more recent years.<sup>329</sup> The youth activists centred around the Caucasian Forum in Istanbul previously used to go to the caves in Kefken a day before the official Kaffed event and spend the night in the caves. Representatives from the Caucasian Forum began to challenge the way May 21 events were usually conducted through solemn commemoration ceremonies held at specific places of importance to Circassian history. They organised demonstrations in the centre of a key city (Istanbul), addressing the Russian authorities with statements read publicly in front of the Russian consulate. These demonstrations have since become very popular and have been supported by an increasing number of organisations in recent years.<sup>330</sup>

In the renewed Circassian revival that has unfolded since 2005 with the arrival of a number of new organisations, ‘the tragedy of 1864’ is being used as part of a campaign for recognition of the forced exile as an act of genocide - as illustrated by, for instance, the Caucasus Forum (see Chapter 3). This has marked a new type of politicisation of the Circassian movement whereby ‘1864’ is now

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<sup>329</sup> Istanbul has, in several ways, become a space of competing Circassian memorialisation, though especially among the post-2005 generation, such as when Cherkessia (Cherkessia.net) organised its own event in 2012. Otherwise, it could be argued that the two large events - the demonstration and the ceremonial event - largely supplement each other. In 2013, the Kaffed-organised annual all-Turkish event took place at Samsun by the Black Sea.

<sup>330</sup> Based on my participation in various May 21 events in Istanbul in 2009 and 2011, supplemented with interviews and conversations with organisers. Beyond the Kefken caves, the Besiktas district of Istanbul is significant as the first place where Circassians landed in Istanbul in the nineteenth century. This is where the Kaffed-organised events in Istanbul have taken place for a number of years - often organised, for instance, one day after the ceremonies at the caves in Kefken. The ceremonies at the Besiktas harbourside also include traditional songs and music, reciting of poems, the showing of visual representations from the nineteenth century on a large screen and, finally, just as the sun sets, one big wreath marking the year 1864 is thrown into the water by representatives dressed in classical Circassian dress from the nineteenth century followed by hundreds of red flowers – one for each person.

used to highlight and seek recognition of the Circassian genocide from the Russian parliament and others. The new organisations have challenged the older ones, whom they accuse of being too culturally oriented and of not being willing to confront the Russian authorities. This has also challenged the way in which May 21 events have traditionally targeted the Circassians internally during commemorative ceremonies with the use of slogans such as ‘we did not forget’ or ‘we will not forget’, as represented by, for instance, Kaffed in Turkey.<sup>331</sup>

Since 2011, a large number of the May 21 events - mainly public demonstrations and other forms of protest have been coordinated transnationally through the may21.org website, where activists from the Caucasian Forum have played a key role. This clearly illustrates the increased internationalisation of the Circassian movement and also exemplifies how youth activism and use of the Internet have become central elements in the renewed Circassian movement. The slogans used include, for instance, “Circassian Genocide - Memorial Day”, “No Sochi Olympics on the Land of Genocide” and “Forever Remember the Circassian Genocide”.<sup>332</sup> Activists from New Jersey (mostly part of the Circassian Cultural Institute) have played a key role in developing a design that could be downloaded, printed out and used in several different places on different continents. This could be seen at demonstrations in an increasing number of cities around the world, as support for these events has gradually grown.<sup>333</sup> In 2012, several thousand joined the perhaps largest Circassian/Caucasian demonstrations in Turkey on the main pedestrian shopping street in Istanbul, Istiklar, ending in front of the Russian consulate.<sup>334</sup> Youth groups from Circassian associations that normally used to take part in the Kaffed-organised events, in 2012 chose also to take part in this demonstration, which marked a bridging of the two major Istanbul-based events that take place at different times, making this possible. This is an example of the increased unity of the Circassian movement - especially on the issues of genocide recognition and protests against the Sochi Olympics but also on the wider priority of promoting Circassian visibility and recognition in general.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Kafkasfederasyonu.org; 21mayis.org. The latter is an example of a new initiative from Kaffed since 2011.

<sup>332</sup> Other slogans used at various Circassian demonstrations in recent years include: “Sochi 2014 - The Hidden Genocide”, “Slaughter of Circassian Heritage and Identity”, “Putin - Don’t build your credibility on Circassian Genocide”. Most of these were distributed from the May21.org and NoSochi2014 - some used ready-made designs while others made their own posters and banners.

<sup>333</sup> One example on how reports from events are shared on various Internet sites is Nosochi2014.com/news/circassians-on-worldstreets.php.

<sup>334</sup> Nosochi2014.com/news/circassians-march-for-recognition-of-genocide.php.

<sup>335</sup> A spill-over effect had already taken place when, for instance, chants of ‘Free Caucasus’, ‘Free Circassia’ and ‘Recognise the Circassian Genocide’ began to spread a few years earlier to the Kaffed-youth during May 21 events, as

'1864' has been used extensively in slogans and posters in connection with the May 21 events around the world in the last five years - as can be witnessed from a number of Circassian and Caucasian websites. The digits '1864' are found twice on the formal emblem of the May 21 day of mourning, an emblem based on a Circassian national costume - the Cherkeska - on which the Circassian Flag can also be found (Jaimoukha 2001, 69).<sup>336</sup> '1864' was the main headline on the posters placed all over Istanbul advertising the public May 21 event arranged by Cherkessia.net in Istanbul in 2012.<sup>337</sup> Many examples of the Circassian representation of 1864 as part of rememorialisation and re-identification processes can be found on YouTube.<sup>338</sup> The production of viral videos has become part of the Circassian revival - both as produced by organisations as part of their ongoing promotion of Circassian issues, for example in relation to the commemorative ceremonial routines of the annual May 21 event, and as produced by a number of individual Circassians.<sup>339</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter 6 ('iCircassia') the Circassian presence and visibility on the Internet has virtually exploded - a situation that has further increased with the arrival and spread of the social media of Web 2.0. The new media situation has certain parallels with the situation in the nineteenth century, when mass media in the form of newspapers and illustrated journals published in different languages in different countries managed for the first time to reach out to new potentially large public audiences<sup>340</sup> - to which information about the Circassians and the war between Russia and the Circassians was delivered.<sup>341</sup> This is the period that Benedict Anderson, in his influential book

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this was not part of the official Kaffed and Kafder slogans. This is an illustration of how youth groups and individuals managed to push for an increased level of politicisation among the overall Circassian movement.

<sup>336</sup> See appendix for illustrations. For instance, Circassian/Caucasian football club in Istanbul is called 'FK 1864'.

<sup>337</sup> This was a third - smaller and competing - May 21 event in Istanbul in 2012 by an organisation focussing on a more 'ethnic' and 'patriotic' understanding of Circassian identity. The two other events generally include other Caucasian peoples in Turkey as has been the tradition in the country, although Kaffed /Kafder have been accused of increasingly focussing on 'ethnicity'.

<sup>338</sup> Many Circassian videos include '1864' or 'May 21' in the title, many of which documents various annual commemoration events from recent years. A documentary produced by Nart TV in 2011 is simply called '21' (youtube.com).

<sup>339</sup> When presented on, for instance, YouTube they are often also presented and accessible via Facebook or other websites. This type of viral video frequently generates comments and debates that can become emotional, angry etc. and which, from time to time, leads to the removal of comments as spam by the editors.

<sup>340</sup> The (mid-)nineteenth century was marked by the spread of newspapers and journals - especially in many European countries which, for the first time, reached a public audience undergoing a transition to increasingly become an important part of the sphere of politics, which also gradually underwent different degrees of democratic transition...

<sup>341</sup> Another significant feature of the nineteenth century was the establishment of civil society organisations that wished to address political issues - the anti-slavery efforts are a well-known example (it also included Circassian aspects due to the Circassian women who were still being sold in markets in Constantinople and popular in the harems of the Ottoman

‘Imagined Communities’ from 1983, has labelled the era of ‘print capitalism’. The break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in the publication of a number of new books, journals, newspaper articles etc. on Circassian issues - often presented or written by Circassians - especially within the three Circassian republics in the North Caucasus and among some of the diaspora countries. This could be seen as a return to the period of ‘print capitalism’ experienced in the nineteenth century - with obvious changes in both form and content. As discussed in the chapter on iCircassia, during the 1990s this was mainly in the form of newspapers, books and local television - sometimes published by new Circassian organisations. The increased role of the electronic media during the 1990s led Arjun Appadurai (among others) to coin the phrase ‘electronic capitalism’ as an update of Anderson’s term. With the arrival of the second-generation websites, including the so-called Web 2.0 within the last ten years, the number of media producers, the number of media products and the number of media consumers has increased significantly.<sup>342</sup> This is both qualitatively and quantitatively a new development that can be labelled ‘digital capitalism’, characterised in particular by the increased access to produce content (and comments/dialogue on/with others), instant possibilities of remediation, and significant new possibilities for interaction with mobile communication units such as mobile phones, tablets etc.

Representations of Circassian culture and history embody a significant part of the new Circassian websites - often in the form of reproductions of texts and illustrations (including historical maps) from the nineteenth century.<sup>343</sup> These representations clearly have a key position in the ongoing Circassian revival as it has unfolded on the Internet over the last couple of years. A certain number of these representations have achieved iconographic status - and they are used and recycled again and again on different websites.<sup>344</sup> Both ‘1864’ and ‘May 21’ also constitute visual representations of Circassian culture and identity and have, as such, achieved iconographic status in the Circassian revival. Since this process of constant remediation is still relatively new and Circassians in some countries have arrived rather late to the Internet, new representations - including those from various archives - can be expected to continue to surface from time to time and further strengthen the

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Empire and beyond). Circassian support committees were established at the time in, for instance, Great Britain, France and Ottoman Turkey, and public meetings in support of the Circassian cause managed to attract spectators in many cities, covered by the media.

<sup>342</sup> ‘Hidden histories’ has a strong potential for mobilisation among digital diasporas, as mentioned elsewhere.

<sup>343</sup> See Appendix for a Russian map of the final conquest in 1864, including names of generals and red arrows showing their encirclement of the remaining Circassian fighters. This map is widely circulated on the Internet by Circassians, for instance in viral videos and as an avatar.

<sup>344</sup> See Appendix.

process of revival. This might include further texts and communicative action in additional languages. The publication of historical documents and images is not only enhancing the visibility of the Circassians but also functions as a way of documenting a Circassian past - and thereby also functioning as a way of establishing the legitimacy of a Circassian 'today' and a Circassian 'tomorrow'. Some of the nineteenth-century representations are used to state not just that 'we were there' and 'we were unjustly treated' but also to illustrate a Circassian nation-building project that included actions and the formulation of intentions to establish an independent Circassian (nation-)state.

One characteristic of a digital diaspora is the new possibilities for creating and presenting counter-narratives in relation to the dominant versions they experience, as imposed upon them by the present rulers of their historical homeland. Russian history writing, in particular, as represented by the official authorities in relation to, for instance, the Sochi Olympics and the celebration of a highly questionable voluntary union between Russia and the Circassians in 2007, is used in the internal Circassian mobilisation process. And it is countered at demonstrations, in Internet protests etc. as well as through involvement in archive-based documentation and publication.

One example of contemporary Circassian counter-narrative is the use of nineteenth-century medals given to participants in the Imperial Russian army for service during the war - often with the year 1864 engraved on them. On a poster from the NoSochi campaign, one of these medals from 1864 is used with reference to Olympic medals under the headline: "THIS IS AN OLYMPIC MEDAL". In smaller letters, it explains: "They are medals given by the Russian government to the soldiers who committed the genocide against the Circassians after the conquest of Sochi".<sup>345</sup> These images are used on posters at demonstrations, on the NoSochi and other Circassian and Caucasian websites, and, for instance, in the magazine *Isthmus*, which is also used as part of a touring exhibition.<sup>346</sup> This recycling by countless websites shows how easily a Web 2.0 remediation process can unfold and spread the message or opinion in question.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> [Nosochi2014.com/press-release/blog.php](http://Nosochi2014.com/press-release/blog.php).

<sup>346</sup> *Isthmus* magazine is produced and published by the Circassian Cultural Institute, New Jersey. For examples of the magazine see: [jantybasha.org/cat=81](http://jantybasha.org/cat=81).

<sup>347</sup> The 1864 medals can today be found in different museums in the region as well as in the national history museum in Moscow. Digitalised images of the medals are used by many Circassian websites as part of their representation of the forced exile, some of which use them as part of the reframing of a Circassian narrative on the forced exile as an act of genocide.

Another example from the Circassian revival is the use of Krasnaya Polyana, the place where the downhill skiing competitions will take place during the Sochi Winter Olympics - in Russian Krasnaya Polyana can be translated as 'red' or 'beautiful' meadow.<sup>348</sup> The use of the colour red is often referred among Circassians as originating from the amount of blood spilled at this place in the final phase of the war. The appointed winner of the anti-mascot competition organised by the NoSochi2014 campaign showed a skier skiing down a blood-red mountain.<sup>349</sup> In most of the Russian tourist guide-book of the area, the name is translated as 'Beautiful Meadow', which perhaps is not so discomfiting for the tourists, who are mostly ethnic Russians.

Another poster/page from Isthmus, 'May 21, 1864' graphically illustrates the potential contemporary population of Circassia, had the war in the nineteenth century not ended in the victory of the Russian Empire - May 21 1864 marks the demographic breaking point: presented as 20 million instead of the 2 to 6 million scattered around the globe today.<sup>350</sup>

According to a model for analysing indigenous peoples revival through the use of the Internet, developed by the anthropologist Maximilian Forte (already presented elsewhere), the key issues that need to be focused on are visibility, embodiment, recognition and authenticity. These four issues all constitute key elements of the ongoing Circassian mobilisation. After visiting and interviewing a number of representatives of Circassian organisations - especially among the diaspora - I find that 'recognition' can particularly be used to characterise the Circassian revival. Recognition of not just the Circassian genocide but a wider recognition on a number of different levels as a contemporary people of the Caucasus, as well as an historical people of the Caucasus, in the history books of the world. Not least in Russia, where the Circassian homeland is today located.

The use of 'May 21, 1864' in the Circassian revival on the Internet is generally part of a story of war and genocide, both of which can be found in highly discernible genres of cultural production such as novels, films, documentaries, cartoons, games (board and computer versions) etc. With the explosive development of Web 2.0, an additional production of, for instance, videos have widened the circle of producers to include a strong vernacular element. A certain number of illustrations of

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<sup>348</sup> As in the case of Red Square in Moscow. Richmond (2013, 2) also refers to blood as the origin of the name.

<sup>349</sup> Nosochi2014.com/press-release/blog.php.

<sup>350</sup> For example Isthmus magazine see: jantybasha.org/cat=81.



the nineteenth-century war are repeatedly used by the Circassian websites and in their viral videos.<sup>351</sup> The fascination of war in general is, in the Circassian case, a combination of pride in the military skills and achievement of their forefathers, and sadness and anger at the tragedy of forced exile (and the lack of Russian recognition thereof).

In general, an assessment of the use of cultural memory in the transnational revival of the Circassians must also be seen within a wider context of developing new national or ethnic narratives after the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union from 1989 to 1991. Just as Western Europe and large parts of the rest of the world went through similar phases in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when decolonisation processes led to the establishment of a number of new nation-states - and new minority groups were created. This also hints at the potential relevance of the field of post-colonial studies or the overlapping cultural studies when analysing the mediated output of the Circassian websites.

The Circassians' renaming of the war as 'the Russian-Circassian War 1763-1864' can be seen as an attempt at challenging official Russia's rather lacklustre relationship with its imperial past. Since 'claiming by naming' is a regular feature of colonisation, it is no surprise that 'reclaiming by renaming' is a part of the efforts of decolonisation (Day 2008, 49). Ashplant, Dawson and Roper have also stressed the importance of the politics of naming in relation to war remembrance: naming wars, which is usually a nation-state undertaking, is also a way of framing memories (Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 2009, 53). Renaming (and reperiodising) appears to be one of those key issues around which the mobilisation of the ongoing Circassian revival has produced a new consensus, alongside the issues of genocide recognition and protesting against the Sochi 2014 Olympic Games.

The issue of the naming of the war has caused discussions on Wikipedia (including in the Wikipedia-subgroup on 'Military History') and it has been suggested to name the war(s) the Russo-Circassian Wars (as Russian-Circassian Wars would be poor English). This would be more correct as 101 years of continuous war was never the case. But then a new problem arises: the official period of 'The Caucasian War' was also not 47 year of continuous warfare.<sup>352</sup> Anyway, the Wikipedia discussions illustrate how new digital spaces have developed.

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<sup>351</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>352</sup> The article in German is much longer than the English language version.

## Conclusion

The date of 'May 21, 1864' was quickly established as a key element - the defining moment - of post-Soviet Circassian identity immediately after 1991. This understanding has, in the years since, been steadily enforced and further institutionalised within Circassian communities around the world in a multitude of ways. This process of institutionalisation has increased significantly during the ongoing second Circassian revival, in which the social media of Web 2.0 play a substantial role. It has become the foundation on which the Circassian revival has since gathered pace within the more recent issues of 'genocide recognition' and the '2014 Sochi Olympics'. The 'when', the 'where' and the 'what' of the Circassian Revival, whereby 'May 21, 1864' constitutes the 'when'; the Sochi 2014 Olympics has become both a 'where' and a 'when' - while 'genocide recognition' has become the 'what', - form a new and dominant heading for the Circassian revival. These three issues can be seen as linked in a (triangular) wheel, a loop or a spiral, in which inputs for one issue almost automatically and constantly contribute to reproducing and reinforcing the other two. These three issues have come to define a Circassian master-narrative as it is produced and reproduced in the ongoing Circassian revival.

1864 is not just a defining moment among the Circassians; neighbouring Abkhazians and other peoples of the Caucasus also share this date. It is also part of a wider North Caucasian memorialisation in which the wars with the Imperial Russian army in the nineteenth century play a decisive role - as seen in the celebrations of the resistance led by Imam Shamil among Chechens and Dagestanis in the eastern Caucasus. It is also part of a related movement to redefine the role of the Russian Empire in Georgia south of the main Caucasian mountain range, whereby the role of Russia during the latter years and, especially after 2008, has been reframed as 400 years of authoritarian rule. This attempt at redefinition runs parallel to academic efforts in Georgia (and elsewhere in the Caucasus) to increase an understanding of the existence of a Caucasian civilisation. Georgian actors play a key role in this process. Together, all these efforts represent a significant challenge to the official Russian understanding of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century, in what has many parallels with post-colonial encounters, resistance or protests against a former imperial centre. This illustrates how the contemporary reproduction of

Circassianness during the Circassian revival - in spite of various divisions and potential conflicts - is part of a wider trend of Caucasian memorialisation and reidentification.<sup>353</sup>

May 21 as a Russian Day of Remembrance (especially for the army) disappeared with the Russian Empire but has, in the post-Soviet context, reappeared in competing versions in the North Caucasian space. On the one hand, the Russian army and especially the recreated Cossack movement, sometimes supported by local and regional representatives from the authorities in Krasnodar Krai and Stavropol Krai, celebrate the victory at certain events and on certain dates. This often includes ceremonies at the statues of famous generals or other forms of memorialisation.<sup>354</sup> On the other, the Circassian institutionalisation of May 21 as a Day of Remembrance has become widely visible within the Circassian republics in the North Caucasus as well as among the diaspora countries - and has also become more visible with its increased reporting on the Internet. This is a local example of competing post-Soviet memorialisation in a region within the Russian Federation that re-actualises the war, the expulsions and conflicts of the nineteenth century.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> '1864' is a year of war memorialisation with strong symbolic importance among the Circassians and the Danes (or rather, Denmark). In both cases the year '1864' has achieved a status as the 'defining moment' though the two contexts are very different. The official budgets for war commemoration are clearly much larger when performed by a (nation-)state but judging by the level of activity on Facebook, the year '1864' generates less dynamic or vernacular interests in Denmark than in the Circassian World.

<sup>354</sup> For instance the monument to Tsarina Katharina in Krasnodar.

<sup>355</sup> This change in the use of this day towards a form of competing memorialisation can be said to mark a challenge to the understanding of the colonial character of the Russian Empire on the part of the Circassians, while the Cossacks use this date as part of their general post-Soviet rehabilitation.

## *Chapter 8*

### **Genocide Recognition as a key issue in the Circassian Revival<sup>356</sup>**

Recognition of the ‘Circassian genocide’ has become a catch phrase of the ongoing Circassian revival.<sup>357</sup> It has proven to be an issue that can encompass many of the aims of the Circassian revival. In combination with the ‘2014 Sochi Winter Olympics’, the issue of genocide recognition has gained significant support in the Circassian world and has increasingly managed to generate interest beyond Circassian and Caucasian public spheres. It could be argued that genocide recognition has become the ‘What’ of the Circassian revival - as a supplement to the ‘Where’ of Sochi - as generated by the Olympic project. Both can be said to build on one of the main results of the post-Soviet Circassian revival: the creation of 1864 as the ‘When’, especially marked by the successful establishment of May 21<sup>st</sup> as the transnational Circassian ‘day of commemoration’ for the last twenty years. The role of ‘1864’ has been further enhanced by the fact that 2014, when the Sochi Olympic Games will take place, marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the final Circassian exodus from the Caucasus. The Olympic project has thereby further strengthened the link to the ‘when’ of the Circassian revival. Genocide recognition has become the new ‘banner’ of the Circassian revival over the last couple of years in particular, to a much greater degree than before. I suggest that these three issues - the what, when and where – can together be seen as linked in a triangle whereby the three issues constantly and mutually reinforce each other in the mediated Circassian mobilisation and memorialisation process. The potential repercussions of the new dominance of an agenda on genocide recognition for the Circassian revival are also discussed in this paper.

Since shortly before the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the year ‘1864’ has gradually become institutionalised as a so-called ‘defining moment’ of the contemporary Circassian identity, as can be seen in the activities of many Circassian organisations and Internet initiatives.<sup>358</sup> The annual May 21<sup>st</sup> commemorations, which have increased in number and size around the world, have played a key role in this process - supplemented by a number of publications, conferences etc. This process

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<sup>356</sup> Initial version presented at the conference ‘Circassian Day’ at the European Parliament, Brussels, June 18, 2012.

<sup>357</sup> Where I have chosen to use the term ‘Circassian genocide’ without labelling it as ‘alleged’ or ‘so-called’, it is partly for practical reasons and partly due to the fact that the term is now widely used throughout the Circassian World. This is also reflected in the books of, for instance, Richmond (2013) and Bullough (2010). The issue is further discussed below.

<sup>358</sup> ‘Defining moment’ is a term applied by Henry R. Huttenbach (1995, 672).

has, in recent years, been significantly expanded through the use of the Internet in a number of different ways. I argue that, through the international mega sports event of the Olympics, ‘Sochi’ has become a concrete geographical representation of the mythological Circassian homeland. This is particularly the case among the Circassian diaspora - most of whom have never visited the Caucasus.

When the renewed Circassian revival gathered pace from 2005 onwards, the issue of genocide recognition was at the centre from the beginning. A number of new Circassian organisations were established at this point, in what could be labelled a second generation of post-Soviet civil society mobilisation. They were generally characterised by a will to act politically - partly in opposition to the older associations that, for many years, had mainly focused on cultural issues.<sup>359</sup> An appeal for recognition of the Circassian genocide was initiated by the Circassian Congress in the North Caucasus and was forwarded to the Russian parliament, the Duma, in 2005. A year later, the appeal was rejected by the Duma with the reason that the issue was not relevant since the events in question had not taken place during the Soviet period. This was a kind of non-answer that not only illustrated the difficulties of coming to terms with historical injustices in the Russian Federation in general but also offered the new Circassian organisations a motivation for renewed mobilisation. The contradiction in this non-answer from the Russian Duma is evident in a North Caucasian context, where the Circassian ‘co-titular’ nationalities of the two double-titular republics of Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachai-Cherkessia - the Balkars and the Karachais – were formally rehabilitated and had their forced deportations during the Second World War officially recognised in 1991.

### **Genocide in a Caucasian and post-Soviet context**

Before turning to the recent role of genocide recognition in the Circassian revival, a few words on the historical background to issues of genocide in a post-Soviet context will be appropriate. The presumed Circassian genocide took place in the mid-nineteenth century and has recently increasingly been labelled as a precursor to the Armenian genocide of 1915 and the role of genocide in general in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both the Armenian and the Circassian genocides occurred in the

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<sup>359</sup> This type of politicisation of civil society was traditionally looked upon negatively in the contexts of the two most important countries of Circassian residence - Russia and Turkey.

wider Caucasus area in times of uncertainty and competition between the advancing Russian Empire and the waning Ottoman Empire.<sup>360</sup> As Muslims increasingly faced difficulties in parts of the northern Caucasus, with the Russian advance, it similarly became difficult to belong to a Christian minority in the Ottoman periphery in the southern parts of the Caucasus.<sup>361</sup> The conditions in the South and the North were, nonetheless, different as the Russian army was the main agent in the Circassian genocide for a long period, while the picture was more blurred in the case of Armenians in the process of Ottoman disintegration - although, in today's Turkey, the fear of Armenians siding with the advancing Russian Empire is widely referred to.<sup>362</sup> The modern era of parallel imperial disintegration and competition - in which the colonial drive had reached its final phase and the last blank spots on the maps of the world, according to this logic, had to be conquered relatively quickly - appears to have created a contradictory policy of pogroms and forced eviction of populations in the imperial borderlands, at least on the surface.<sup>363</sup> On the other hand, the extreme violence applied was supposed to mark the arrival of civilisation, enlightenment and Christianity. Power and possession of territory were, however, more important drivers, especially for peoples who could be characterised as uncivilised and savage, as illustrated by these population policies that had become more radical and absolute in their character.<sup>364</sup> According to Peter Holquist, the war and expulsion of the Circassians marked a significant change in population policies of the Russian Empire that earlier had performed other act of 'demographic warfare' but as a population policy this was in the case of the Circassians taken to a new and more systematic level (Geraci 2008, 349). This kind of population policy culminated in the Holocaust which took place during the Nazi reign in Germany and in the occupied territories.<sup>365</sup> These events led in 1948 to the adoption of the UN

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<sup>360</sup> Many of the Circassians expelled from Russia were placed in central Anatolia, where they not only had to farm a difficult landscape for agriculture but could also potentially form a buffer zone in relation to the Armenians and Kurds living on the eastern side of the new Circassian settlements.

<sup>361</sup> The Caucasian 'Bloodlands' - by extension? The extreme violence that accompanied the Imperial processes of advance qualifies the Caucasus to be described in the same terms as used for the clashes of empires in Eastern Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, which was entitled 'Bloodlands' by Timothy Snyder (2010). The Caucasus in the nineteenth century has by Robert Geraci been referred to as a "Eurasian zone of violence" (Geraci 2008, 346). The Kurds are also located close to the Caucasus and Anatolia, and today also refer to a Kurdish genocide, namely in Iraq in 1988. As with the Circassian, the genocidal persecutions did not take place only in that year.

<sup>362</sup> Reports on both cases of genocidal actions reached Western or European media while they were ongoing, but the actual results and the full extent of the cruelty of the actions only emerged gradually.

<sup>363</sup> Like the role of anti-Jewish pogroms in the borderlands between the Russian and the Austro-Hungarian Empires as a precursor to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Holocaust and Stalinist purges, as illustrated by Snyder (2010).

<sup>364</sup> These new forms of population or demographic policies became some of the first examples of Muslim and Christian population exchanges between Russia and Ottoman Turkey, which later also included the exchange of population between Greece and Turkey.

<sup>365</sup> The successful mediated memorialisation and mobilisation, seen in relation to the Holocaust in particular but also the Armenian genocide, has served as an inspiration for many of the actors of the Circassian revival. This includes the role of diaspora promotion and lobbying.

Convention on Genocide, in which genocide is defined as “actions that are carried out with the intent, fully or partly, to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group”.<sup>366</sup>

This kind of radical method had already been applied on many occasions by European colonial empires towards indigenous populations, for instance, in South and North America from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century - methods that today would be labelled genocidal (Totten, Parsons and Hitchcock 2002). An encounter with this type of population policy of the past plays a significant role in the ongoing struggle for increased recognition and equal rights among many indigenous peoples around the world (Smith 1999, 34).<sup>367</sup> The increased international focus on the rights of indigenous peoples and the success of the international lobbying efforts of indigenous peoples’ movements are also part of the inspiration behind the Circassian revival.<sup>368</sup> This combination of an ‘indigenous genocide’ and what is often referred to as a ‘classical (East) European borderland genocide’, such as the Armenian and the Jewish, is an intersection that in many ways is characteristic of the Caucasian context.

As with other terms, such as for instance, geopolitics, the term genocide has gained renewed usage since the fall of Communism, and has been accompanied by another and related new term: ‘ethnic cleansing’.<sup>369</sup> Claims of genocide during the Soviet period have been raised in several of the post-Soviet successor states, for instance, in the Baltic States and in the Ukraine, where the so-called Holodomor is a relatively new term for genocidal actions - especially referring to the enforced famine during Stalin’s regime in the 1930s. This became subject to competing memorialisation as many in Russia protested against it by arguing that Stalinist purges and Gulag camps also affected Russians and other peoples of the former Soviet Union - and that this type of ‘enforced famine’ also affected large areas of Soviet Russia, for instance in the North Caucasus.

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<sup>366</sup> [genocidescholars.org/resources/about-genocide](http://genocidescholars.org/resources/about-genocide), [www.folkedrab.dk/sw50052.asp](http://www.folkedrab.dk/sw50052.asp) - Article 2. The renewed civil society mobilisation of the Circassian diaspora is also a process of redefining the diaspora inspired by the role of ‘genocide recognition’ in the Armenian and Jewish diaspora mobilisation processes.

<sup>367</sup> “...to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying” (Smith 1999, 28).

<sup>368</sup> In the book ‘Annihilating Difference’ by Alexander Laban Hinton (ed., 2002), the introductory chapter is called ‘The Dark Side of Modernity’, and the following chapter on genocide and indigenous peoples is entitled ‘Modernity’s Edges’.

<sup>369</sup> In relation to the wider European public sphere, especially in relation to the wars in the former Yugoslavia, where the killing of thousands of Bosnian Muslims (Bosniacs) in Srebrenica was labelled as a genocidal action by the media - and later acknowledged by the War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague. Fears of another attempted at genocide led to a Nato intervention in Kosovo in 1999.

In the Russian North Caucasus, the formerly deported peoples, who were allowed to return from forced exile in Central Asia after 1957 now required recognition and rehabilitation. This was formally granted and a law on the rehabilitation of deported peoples was adopted by the Russian parliament in 1991. Complaints regarding the shortcomings of the implementation of this law are regularly voiced however (Richmond 2008, 134; Krag and Funch 1994, 30). This was accompanied by civil society initiatives to commemorate Stalinist attempts at genocide, including the establishment of new monuments and museums, and new annual commemorative events. The Balkars and the Karachai, who both constitute titular nationalities together with Circassian co-nationalities, also began to initiate similar processes, which resulted in counter-reactions from the Circassians.<sup>370</sup> In Nalchik, the capital of the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, this has led to a situation whereby a new museum to commemorate the Balkars' genocide has been built while the Circassian genocide is only briefly mentioned in the republican museum.<sup>371</sup> On the other hand, a centrally-placed monument to the Circassian genocide has been erected in a park in Nalchik. The wars in Chechnya in the 1990s that resulted in the death of more than 100,000 Chechens are also regularly referred to as the Chechen genocide.<sup>372</sup> In August 2008, Russia officially used the term 'genocide' as the reason for Russian intervention against the Georgian army in South Ossetia - though only from the second day of the conflict (Staun 2008, 5). This might be a coincidence but it might also indicate a shift towards a conscious use of the term genocide as part of the political spin - possibly also in order to contribute to the 'watering down' of a term that many politicians, academics and others in Russia are often opposed to. In any case, this illustrates how the term has gained mainstream political usage.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> It was a Balkarian initiative during the late Perestroika period that resulted in a related Circassian initiative, which illustrates the element of mutual action-reaction in neighbouring ethno-nationalist movements, which, for instance, can take the form of competing memorialisation. Similarly, one of the incidents that triggered the contemporary Circassian revival was the threat of the dissolution of the Republic of Adygea in 2004. As illustrated by a statement by Ruslan Keshev from the Circassian Congress from KBR at a conference in Anaklia, Georgia, in May 2012: "The Balkars were deported in 13 years, we were deported in 148 years".

<sup>371</sup> A rebuilding of the Republican Museum is planned and could include revised representations of the 'genocides'. Instead, issues relating to the Circassian defeat in the war with the Russian Empire, the forced exile, the Circassian genocide etc. have regularly been dealt with in a large room of the museum reserved for changing exhibitions.

<sup>372</sup> Recognition of the deportation from 1944 to 1957 played a key role in the Chechen independence movement of the 1990s. During their period in power a monument to the Chechen genocide was created in the centre of Grozny. The key statue of this monument, which also included a large number of old gravestones that were disposed of or used as building material during the Stalinist period, was later moved to the outskirts close to the Russian army headquarters, by the pro-Russian leadership in 2008 (Kuwait Times via genocidewatch.org 05-06-2008).

<sup>373</sup> This use of the term 'genocide prevention' was also a way of echoing the Western argument for the air strikes against Serbia in 1999.



Locally in the North Caucasus, two of the Circassian republics recognised the Circassian genocide in the 1990s. The Parliament in Kabardino-Balkaria formally recognised the genocide in 1992, while the parliament in the Republic of Adygea did the same in 1997.<sup>374</sup> Due to this, some representatives from the Russian authorities, including some highly-placed Circassians, responded to the 2005 claims for recognition of the Circassian genocide by stating that this was not needed as it had already been recognised.<sup>375</sup> When the International Circassian Association (ICA) became a member of the UNPO in 1994, recognition of the Circassian genocide by the Russian Federation was noted as one of the key aims of the organisation.<sup>376</sup> Since 2005, UNPO has regularly published articles on the Circassian campaign for genocide recognition on its website, [unpo.org](http://unpo.org).

Many of the above-mentioned examples illustrate a kind of institutionalised competing memorialisation, as it may unfold within a framework of sub-federal administrative governance with roots in the early Soviet era. It also illustrates how this form of Soviet heritage often leaves the local North Caucasian authorities with challenges that can affect the political environment in these entities negatively.<sup>377</sup>

## **The Post-2005 Process**

An application for recognition of the Circassian genocide, which included hundreds of historical documents from the nineteenth century to underline the argument, was sent to the Russian parliament, the Duma, on July 1, 2005.<sup>378</sup> The application was submitted by the organisation Circassian Congress from the Republic of Adygea and was later re-sent now signed by six Circassian organisations, including some from outside Russia.

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<sup>374</sup> The book 'Genocid Adygov' [Circassian Genocide], by the historians Kasumov and Kasumov, was published in Nalchik in 1992, with references to much of the documentation from archives which, since 2005, had become part of the renewed attempts at genocide recognition. In many ways, this marked one of first significant steps on the post-Soviet road towards the Circassian promotion of genocide recognition. The book was subsequently translated and published in Turkey.

<sup>375</sup> For instance, Asker Sokht from Krasnodar Krai in June 2012 during the Circassian Day in Brussels.

<sup>376</sup> Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO, [Unpo.org/article/7869](http://Unpo.org/article/7869)).

<sup>377</sup> For instance calls for 'European forms of self-determination' are rejected by the federal authorities offhand - in spite of great efforts and will from the side of the Russian leadership to join international organisations such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE, which promote this kind of 'self-determination'.

<sup>378</sup> A petition was published on May 8, 2005 addressing the UN, the US Congress, the Council of Europe and the international community in general calling for the recognition of the Circassian genocide ([unpo.org/article/2452](http://unpo.org/article/2452)).

The application to the Russian parliament was rejected in a letter to the Circassian Congress in January 2006. The reason given was that the Circassians were not on the list of ethnic groups repressed during the Soviet era, a list that had been prepared by the Institute of History at the Russian Academy of Science. In reaction to this ‘non-answer’, the chairman of Circassian Congress noted that a negative answer was also a result: “Now the organisations - the participants of the campaign - have a right (including a moral one) to address the international bodies”.<sup>379</sup>

An appeal for recognition of the Circassian genocide was sent to the President of the European Parliament on October 11, 2006.<sup>380</sup> The appeal was now signed by 20 organisations from the homeland as well as the diaspora countries. The number of historical documents attached had increased and was presented with an index that has since also been used in the translated versions that can be found on the [circassian-genocide.com](http://circassian-genocide.com) website. The Circassian appeal subsequently became part of the regular consultations on minority rights and discrimination between Russia and the European Union, and with other European institutions, such as the Council of Europe and OSCE, of which Russia is a member.

Provision of documentation has been a priority from the beginning for the renewed campaign for genocide recognition, although a search of Imperial Russian archives had been taking place over a number of years on an individual basis.<sup>381</sup> This material had to be compiled from different sources and scientific books and articles with references to specified archive documents. Eyewitness reports etc. also had to be collected and assessed.<sup>382</sup> All of this material was attached to the above-mentioned appeals as documentation.

This file of documents has since been expanded with additional documents and the more than 480 documents from the Russian archives have since 2012, been published on the website [circassian-](http://circassian-genocide.com)

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<sup>379</sup> [unpo.org/article/3634](http://unpo.org/article/3634).

<sup>380</sup> [unpo.org/article/5634](http://unpo.org/article/5634); [circassian-genocide.com/page.php?id=26](http://circassian-genocide.com/page.php?id=26).

<sup>381</sup> As stated by, for instance, Ayse Pul (2011, 395), an examination of the archives of the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire is still in its early stages and much still needs to be done.

<sup>382</sup> For instance, the above mentioned book by Kasumov and Kasumov (1992) was one of the first academic examinations to include a variety of historical sources as documentation. Other publications include the exile publications by Ramazan Traho (1991) and several others (Jaimoukha 2009). Further supplemented by publications such as the nineteenth-century books by A. P. Berge and Rostislav Fadeev (*Kavkazskaia voina*. Moscow 2005 (first published as ‘Pisma s Kavkaza’ in 1864-1865)). Fadeev was a general and subsequently became an imperial army historian specialising in the Caucasian Wars of the nineteenth century. The Russian historian Berge has been called the official Russian historian of the Caucasian Wars.

genocide.com with translations into Arabic, English, Russian and Turkish.<sup>383</sup> Research and provision of documentation has been given a high priority by many of the Circassian organisations - even before 2005 - but now different organisations have coordinated and cooperated to establish and present this material on the Internet.<sup>384</sup> According to the Committee of Volunteers that presented the material in May 2012, the purpose of the website presentation is for the material "...to be read and comprehended by the maximum possible Circassians and non-Circassians alike, so as to be able to provide the truth of the 'Circassian Question' to Academicians, Legislatures, Study and Research Institutions, Universities, Human Rights Organisations, Media and International Public Opinion".<sup>385</sup> A research study published by the American historian Walter Richmond in his 2013 book, "The Circassian Genocide" is the most recent example of how this material - together with documents from other archives - has been made available to researchers thus bypassing the Russian archive authorities (and reducing the costs of travel). Other archives more recently made available and translated are the Imperial Russian archives in Georgia and archives from the Ottoman Empire. Both consist of handwritten sources, and in the case of the latter most often in the Turkish language but in Arabic script, which requires the assistance of specialists for the translation. Some of this material has been published in different languages - efforts that can be expected to continue in the very near future.

The majority of the 487 documents are from the nineteenth century and consist especially of military reports and letters to and from commanding officers, including some of the key actors in the many years of warfare in the region.<sup>386</sup> These are supplemented with extracts from

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<sup>383</sup> [circassian-genocide.com](http://circassian-genocide.com). A CD-version in the four languages is circulated at conferences and other Circassian/Caucasian events.

<sup>384</sup> Presented on behalf of the 'Committee of Volunteers' by Radio Adiga ([radioadiga.com](http://radioadiga.com)) and Justice for the North Caucasus ([justicefornorthcaucasus.info](http://justicefornorthcaucasus.info)). Some of the translations have been secured in a transnational cooperation between Circassian organisations. The Committee of Volunteers encourages Circassians in different states to further translate and circulate the documents ([circassian-genocide.com/Documents/English.pdf](http://circassian-genocide.com/Documents/English.pdf)).

<sup>385</sup> From the introduction ([circassian-genocide.com/Documents/English.pdf](http://circassian-genocide.com/Documents/English.pdf), page 4). Here the authors further elaborate on the purpose of their effort: "With honour and pride, volunteers who worked for years to present and bring up this important project into existence are intending to publish and disseminate this documented information for all whom it may concern, so that the narrative of the details of what had happened as per the correspondence taken place on the level of leaders and military commanders of the Tsarist Russian Empire would verify the truth and tell the whole story of the Circassian Tragedy." And the final sentence states: "The confiscated rights should be reinstated and restored in accordance with the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Law and the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination".

<sup>386</sup> Cossack groups were often placed at the forefront of the attacks on Circassian villages in the nineteenth century. Today, Kuban Cossacks often live in areas neighbouring the Circassians, and have in recent years undergone a revival, with similarities to the Circassian revival but with stronger support from the local, regional and federal authorities. This has re-actualised the competing and conflicting memorialisation between the two groups. Cossack organisations have also raised claims of genocide, in reference to Stalinist purges against the Cossacks in the 1830s.

autobiographies and memoirs written about the period and published mostly in the nineteenth century after the end of the war in 1864. There are more than 50 documents from the 1830s and more than 250 from the 1860s, which constitute the two central periods.<sup>387</sup>

The material from the documents has been used for information and visibility purposes in publications and exhibitions targeting Circassians internally as well as the wider public at large.

The process, which has been labelled a ‘war on conferences’, culminated in the ‘Hidden Nations, Enduring Crimes’ conference in Tbilisi in March 2010. This conference received support from the Georgian government and was arranged in cooperation with the American think tank, Jamestown Foundation.<sup>388</sup> The conference ended with a recommendation to the Georgian parliament to recognise the Circassian genocide.<sup>389</sup> It should be noted that some Circassian organisations - especially CCI from New Jersey - had lobbied the Georgian parliament as well as the parliaments of some of the Baltic States as part of this process. The Russian authorities reacted in different ways, after a long period of mostly ignoring the Circassian revival.<sup>390</sup> Two roundtable seminars were held in Moscow with the participation of Circassian representatives from organisations that had not signed the genocide recognition applications nor taken part in the Tbilisi conference. One of these initiatives backfired when the representative from the Circassian Association of California in statements during and after a Moscow roundtable in 2010 openly criticised the Russian authorities. Since then, the representatives from Circassian organisations in California have more actively supported the genocide recognition agenda. A large international Circassian conference in Jordan in late 2010, which many representatives from the Circassian diaspora saw as a follow-up to the Tbilisi conference, was cancelled due to Russian pressure on the royal Jordanian authorities. As an

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<sup>387</sup> One example is, for instance, Document 36, a report from General Zass to Baron Rosen (February 25, 1834). Zass has become ‘famous’ as part of the combined Circassian memorialisation and mobilisation, with the picture showing Circassian heads placed on the fence around the house of General Zass in particular being widely circulated and remediated, as mentioned in Chapter 4. More on the role of General Zass in the contemporary Circassian memorialisation process below.

<sup>388</sup> Shortly after, the conference achieved a separate entry at Wikipedia.

<sup>389</sup> The statement from the conference also suggested that May 21<sup>st</sup> should be recognised as an official ‘day of remembrance’ and that Sochi should be recognised as a site and symbol of the Circassian genocide and ethnic cleansing as a reaction to the 2014 Sochi Olympics ([natpress.net/stat\\_e.php?id=5199](http://natpress.net/stat_e.php?id=5199)).

<sup>390</sup> According to Sergey Markedonov, this conference would have been forgotten in the “myriad of seminars and round tables that take place in the Georgian capital were it not for its unusually influential organizers - the Jamestown Foundation, an American think tank, and Mikheil Saakashvili’s personal education project, the Ilya Chavchavadze University” ([russiaprofile.org](http://russiaprofile.org) via [cakhasa.com/news/Crossing\\_the\\_Mountains.html](http://cakhasa.com/news/Crossing_the_Mountains.html)). Shortly after the conference in Tbilisi, Markedonov recommended an active Russian strategy as a reaction to the conference by “reaching agreement with ‘moderate’ Circassian activist groups before the Sochi Olympics” ([natpress.net/stat\\_e.php?id=5245](http://natpress.net/stat_e.php?id=5245)).

extension of the Tbilisi conference, a Circassian Cultural Institute was opened on February 16, 2012 in Tbilisi, financed by the Georgian government.<sup>391</sup>

On May 20, 2011 the Georgian parliament became the first UN-member state to officially recognise the Circassian genocide of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - one day before the annual transnational Circassian day of commemoration.<sup>392</sup> This decision was based on a scientific presentation and conclusions, both of which are available together with the resolution on the website of the Georgian parliament.<sup>393</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, many Circassians in the Caucasus responded positively to the Georgian recognition.<sup>394</sup> To many Circassians and Caucasians in Turkey in general, this was a controversial issue that led to many discussions and considerations due to the fact that, during the post-Soviet period Circassian organisations had been critical of Georgia, in solidarity with the Abkhassians.<sup>395</sup>

Circassian representatives from American organisations gave presentations on the Circassian genocide at two international genocide conferences in July 2011. Cicek Duman Chek and John Haghor from the Circassian Association in California spoke at the Third Global Conference on Genocide arranged by the International Network of Genocide Scholars (INGS) in San Francisco on July 1, 2011. The presentation was built around arguments relating to 'intent' - as a key issue of the UN Convention on Genocide - and based on archive material from the nineteenth century.<sup>396</sup> Eyad Cougar from CCI/ICC in New Jersey suggested the "possibility of a resolution on this continuing, hidden and forgotten Circassian genocide" at the Ninth Biennial Conference of the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) in Buenos Aires on July 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>397</sup>

The Georgian involvement was further marked by the revelation of a new monument to the Circassian genocide in the Georgian Black Sea coastal town of Anaklia and additional

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<sup>391</sup> [eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/20127](http://eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/20127) (17-02-2012).

<sup>392</sup> [www.parliament.ge/files/1544\\_32742\\_536746\\_genocidi\\_en.pdf](http://www.parliament.ge/files/1544_32742_536746_genocidi_en.pdf)

<sup>393</sup> [www.parliament.ge/files/1544\\_32742\\_536746\\_genocidi\\_en.pdf](http://www.parliament.ge/files/1544_32742_536746_genocidi_en.pdf). Staff members of the Circassian Cultural Institute in Tbilisi were involved in preparing this material.

<sup>394</sup> [Jamestownfoundation.org](http://Jamestownfoundation.org) (07-04-2010)

<sup>395</sup> When the news of the recognition was announced at a conference in Kayseri in Turkey, it was met with "deep silence" (Markedonov 2011).

<sup>396</sup> A number of nineteenth century sources, that include many eyewitness reports, have been collected by Circassians through a number of years. Chek and Haghor use the first nine pages to present some of these sources of documentation ([adigasite.com/archives/1715](http://adigasite.com/archives/1715)).

<sup>397</sup> The proposal addressed the Executive Board of IAGS. [www.justiceformorthcaucasus.info/?p=1251656538](http://www.justiceformorthcaucasus.info/?p=1251656538)

commemorative events in relation to May 21, 2012.<sup>398</sup> The ceremonies at the seashore and at the new monument were emotional moments for the participating Circassian representatives that had arrived from several countries, including Russia. This was enhanced by the location on the Black Sea coast, in the vicinity of the ruins of a former Russian fort used in the Imperial Russian colonisation of the Caucasus and to ship Circassians and other Caucasians to the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century. The event marked another expansion in the geographical outreach of the annual May 21 events and, according to the organisers, they would also like Anaklia to become a fixed point of the Circassian commemoration in the future. The event in Anaklia included a large exhibition of Circassian items from the museum in Tbilisi, an exhibition of books on Circassians, various forms of cultural entertainment and a one-day conference under the headline: ‘The expected results of the recognition of Circassians genocide’.<sup>399</sup> To participate in the Anaklia event was a contested issue among many Circassians, especially in Turkey, where the close interaction and solidarity with Abkhazians has resulted in a critical attitude towards Georgia. Still, a significant number of Circassians from Turkey chose to participate.

In 2013, the American historian, Walter Richmond, published the book ‘The Circassian Genocide’ based on studies of archives from the nineteenth century, including those from Tbilisi.<sup>400</sup> Since this is the first monograph addressing this issue by an international academic specialist who does not come from the Caucasus, Russia or the former Soviet Union, some of his conclusions, as presented during two conferences in 2012, are included here. Richmond presents two major conclusions: firstly, that archive material and eyewitness reports confirm that genocide as defined in the UN resolution of 1948 has taken place, and secondly, that according to the documents it would be more correct to talk about a “century-long genocidal process”.<sup>401</sup> In the first case, he focused on documents from the period from October 1863 to May 1864, which is the period when the highest number of Circassians were killed, died of other reasons or left the Caucasus. As Richmond states: “Based on documentary evidence, my conservative estimate is that between 320,000 and 400,000

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<sup>398</sup> The winner was the most naturalistic nineteenth-century representation of a grieving Circassian family of three where the father is absent but the pre-teen son is ready to take over according to old tradition (see Appendix). Visually, the statue is very much in line with the ongoing remediation and circulation of nineteenth-century representations that has been very popular among Circassians - and other Caucasians - for a long time.

<sup>399</sup> Other events included a horse race, a (horse) polo game, music, an exhibition of hundreds of Circassian items from the Historical Museum in Tbilisi and an exhibition of books on Circassian issues in a number of languages etc.

<sup>400</sup> The results of the research were presented by Walter Richmond at conferences in May 2012 (Anaklia) and June 2012 (Brussels).

<sup>401</sup> Walter Richmond, Circassian Day conference in European Parliament, Brussels, June 2012. For the organisers, the European Circassian organisation Eurohaxe, this event marked a step in the direction of an increased political orientation as compared with the preceding six years, which were focussed more on culture, language etc.

people died in the period”.<sup>402</sup> More Circassians died en route to the Ottoman Empire, resulting in a total number of 625,000 out of an estimated 1860 population of 1.5 million.<sup>403</sup>

Regarding the second conclusion of the new study, Richmond states that the ‘genocidal campaign’ was already “blockading food and salt shipments and burning villages during a devastating plague” at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the central part of the North Caucasus, where the largest Circassian province Kabarda was located. The population here dropped “ninety percent from 300,000 in 1790 to 30,000 in 1830”.<sup>404</sup> Richmond thus indirectly supports the re-periodisation of the war that is today held by most Circassians and seeks to include the Kabardians in the understanding of the war. This was also indirectly supported by the Russian Academy of Science when they concluded that the Circassians constituted one people, at the request of Circassian organisations in Russia.

### **An Example from the Archives**

The commander of the Russian army in the Caucasus, Count Yevdokimov, stated in a letter in 1864: “I wrote to Count Sumarokov as to why he keeps reminding me in every report concerning the frozen bodies which cover the roads? Don’t the Grand Duke and I know this? But does it depend on anybody to avert this misery?” (Shenfield 2008).<sup>405</sup> During the protracted wars, the Othering of the Circassians (or the natives or the mountaineers or the savages<sup>406</sup> or nations or ‘opponent nations’<sup>407</sup>) reached a new level when they were further demonised as an armed enemy with great knowledge of the local landscape. This is one of the reasons why the Russian army preferred to attack and burn villages at the crack of dawn.<sup>408</sup> The use of enemy images of a terminal nature is part of any war but nonetheless the level of dehumanisation of the Circassians is surprisingly clear in the many reports where reports on killing unarmed civilians are just as frequent as reports of the killings of armed

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<sup>402</sup> Walter Richmond, conference, Brussels, June 2012.

<sup>403</sup> Walter Richmond, conference, Brussels, June 2012. An estimated number of casualties of the eviction of the Circassians is 400,000 out of a population of 1,200,000 (Henze 1992, 104).

<sup>404</sup> Walter Richmond, conference, Brussels, June 2012.

<sup>405</sup> Ramazan Traho: *Cherkessy* [Circassians] (München 1956, 113), quoted from Shenfield (1999).

<sup>406</sup> [www.circassian-genocide.com/Documents/English.pdf](http://www.circassian-genocide.com/Documents/English.pdf): document 36, page 39.

<sup>407</sup> [www.circassian-genocide.com/Documents/English.pdf](http://www.circassian-genocide.com/Documents/English.pdf): document 38, page 39.

<sup>408</sup> [www.circassian-genocide.com/Documents/English.pdf](http://www.circassian-genocide.com/Documents/English.pdf): document 37, page 39.

mountaineers in battle. Such atrocities would today be labelled war crimes while, here, they are noted as simple facts in the administrative reporting system of the army and the empire.

General Zass of the Imperial Russian Army played a key role in the war in the 1830s and has gained a significant role in the Circassian memorialisation. This is particularly due to the story of how Zass collected the skulls of dead Circassians and placed some of them on the fence around his house; others were kept under his bed or boiled in order to send them to his doctor-friend in Berlin. This narrative has been enhanced through an historical (nineteenth-century) visual representation of the house and the fence that has circulated on many Circassian websites and has been included in many YouTube videos. The story of the Circassian skulls in Berlin has resulted in an Internet-based campaign to bring the skulls back for reburial.<sup>409</sup> The campaign site had 922 members (as of October 11, 2012) and many have linked to the site via Facebook. General Zass became one of the key individuals in the Kuban Cossack history in the Caucasus and a statue of him can be seen in the city of Armavir on the Kuban River.<sup>410</sup>

Other quotes from General Zass include the following: “The elimination of the mountainous nations ... I considered it essential that our army reached heights it had never been to before, up to Ahmed Mountains, and the acquisition of the famous Tam neighbourhood in the mountains, which is known for its fortified location and richness, in order to terrorize and intimidate the mountaineers more”.<sup>411</sup> Zass further notes that the Circassians were “terrified from the genocide that occurred in the Tam neighbourhood” and that “this brave storming of the mountains - that have not been touched or reached before by Russians...caused horror among the mountaineers”.<sup>412</sup>

### Another Example from Nineteenth-century Sources

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<sup>409</sup> [causes.com/causes/482253-help-repatriate-circassian-relics-skulls-nones-from-museums-collected-by-general-zass-and-others](http://causes.com/causes/482253-help-repatriate-circassian-relics-skulls-nones-from-museums-collected-by-general-zass-and-others).

<sup>410</sup> A tribute to General Zass as one of the heroes of the Caucasian War - especially among the Kuban Cossacks - can be found on this website: [armavirskiy.narod.ru/hist\\_ktitor\\_addons\\_zass.htm](http://armavirskiy.narod.ru/hist_ktitor_addons_zass.htm). Here a photo can also be found of the statue of General Zass in the city of Armavir, where Zass is considered the founder after he granted this place by the Kuban River to a community of Armenians (referred to as ‘Cherkesogi Armenians’) in 1839 - the village was first called ‘Armyansky Aul’ and was renamed in 1848 to honour the ancient capital of Armenia ([armavirskiy.narod.ru/foto\\_new\\_zass\\_pam.htm](http://armavirskiy.narod.ru/foto_new_zass_pam.htm)). This statue has regularly attracted protests from Circassians.

<sup>411</sup> General Zass, 1834 (document 37, page 39).

<sup>412</sup> General Zass report, document 40, page 41. Tam is destroyed and many residents died in the fire. The inhabitants are noted in the report as being “neither obedient nor loyal to us” but Tam was symbolically useful for spreading fear among the native population (document 37, page 39).



The writings of the nineteenth-century Russian military historian, Rostislav Fadeev, have become one of the important sources in contemporary Circassian memorialisation: “This country, which for a thousand years has been an unassailable fortress, a vast hideaway for brigands, [and] which not one conqueror could approach with impunity, turned instantly, as if through waving with a magic wand, into an uninhabited land, [that was] rightfully belonging to every hardworking Russian person.” (Kreiten 2011, 384).<sup>413</sup> According to Irma Kreiten “this triumphalist stance went hand-in-hand with an equally optimistic view of the new colony’s future. In their first cataloguing of the region, Russian colonial authorities praised its manifold natural treasures, which, in Russia’s view, still lay untouched.” (ibid).<sup>414</sup> Kreiten further notes on the Russian Enlightenment-inspired officials: “They treated Circassian lands as a *tabula rasa*, a landscape form which all traces of prior human existence could be wiped out in order to build up a ‘new country’.” (Kreiten 2011, 390).

Fadeev further noted on the new options for Russia in the land south of the Kuban River that used to be Circassia: “Everywhere man will have free rein; in a warm and healthy climate ploughed fields, pastures, woods and water everywhere, all will be at his hand. [...]. And this sumptuous, one can say, newly discovered land lies not in the Pacific Ocean, but on the shore of the Black Sea. [...]. The Kuban province will grow a breed of people we have not been heard of even in fairy tales. We see Russian mountaineers. A round-faced, fair-haired Russian boy conveys the visiting [female!] tourist on his horses on steep mountain paths [in order] to watch from the neighbouring valley how the sun rises from out of the snows and [how] the shadow of the mountains suddenly reaches out over the whole region.” (Kreiten 2011, 386).<sup>415</sup> Here, Fadeev gets carried away and simply appropriates some of the romanticised understandings of the mountaineers as established in the first part of the century through writers such as Pushkin and Lermontov, while in the 1850s Tolstoy actually attempted to add realism to these romanticised versions. Actually, no Russians wished to live in the former Circassian mountains, where all Circassian mountain-fields and mountain-orchards or plantations subsequently simply turned into forests. Cossacks only wanted to colonise the lowlands.

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<sup>413</sup> Rostislav Fadeev: *Kavkazskaia voina*. Moscow 2005 (first published as ‘Pisma s Kavkaza’ in 1864-1865): (199). Fadeev mostly refer to the Circassians as ‘Caucasian Mountaineers’.

<sup>414</sup> Pasyntkin, In zh.-Polk (1865)

<sup>415</sup> Rostislav Fadeev: *Kavkazskaia voina*. Moscow 2005 (first published as Pisma s Kavkaza in 1864-1865, p. 210-211)

Kreiten refers to a number of sources on how the Russian colonial government tries to justify the colonisation and an image of the Circassians as “lazy natives”, and that it is necessary “to get rid of the irredeemably restless and obstinate populations”, according to quotes from the period immediately after the final victory in mid-1864. As Kreiten notes, these actors of the Russian colonial government used “exactly the same reasoning found with European colonists: they also saw the necessity of getting rid of the so-called ‘lazy natives’ (Kreiten 2011, 388).<sup>416</sup> In contrast: the opposite is claimed, for instance, by Longworth (1840) and others who stayed in Circassia for longer periods in the 1830s who describe the Circassians as anything but lazy, that they represent a Caucasian civilisation with many centuries and perhaps millennia in the area and that they have ordered societies that farm the mountain landscape etc. (Kreiten 2011, 392).

On the fundamental geopolitical reward of the victory in the Caucasian Wars, Fadeev has noted: “The establishment of Russian rule in the Caucasus should exert a decisive influence of the whole of Asian affairs [...]. Due to its central position the Caucasian isthmus commands Muslim Asia [...]” (Kreiten 2011, 392). This statement is in line with another Russian post-1864 victory statement of the period: that by this victory, the Eastern Question was once and for all settled in Russia’s favour.<sup>417</sup>

## Discussion

Was it genocide? What has been documented? According to the many reports from the nineteenth century about the intended killing and forced displacement of the Circassians under extremely severe conditions, the following can be summarised: a) countless reports of burning of villages with inhabitants still sleeping in the houses - livestock had often been stolen first or were stolen in the process and crops destroyed; b) many reports of Cossacks - often supported by other soldiers - killing unarmed Circassians; c) many reports of the Russian army forcing all Circassians out of their villages to take shelter in the high mountains where death by illness and hunger was often the result; d) many reports of dead bodies everywhere along the Black Sea coast, and a lack of food and

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<sup>416</sup> Kreiten refers to Syed Hussein Alatas: *The Myth of the Lazy Native*. London 1977. Kreiten further notes how the understandings were in line with other ideas of the period, for instance, the so-called ‘dying races’ - referring to Kreiten refers to Patrick Brantlinger (1995). Kreiten further notes: “The theory allowed to rationalize colonial genocide by pointing to the unalterable laws of history.” (Kreiten 2011, 389).

<sup>417</sup> Moscow Gazette (03-09-1864, see appendix).

medicine in the makeshift camps, in the last phases of the war; e) the number of deaths in Turkish Black Sea ports due to illness and hunger. Today, many of these reports appear to be cynical reporting on the killing and destruction of Circassians - but this was part of the work and everyday life of Russian officers, soldiers and Cossacks in Circassia at the time. Many of the Circassians were attacked without warning while taking care of their animals and fields, and daily life in general.

An increasing number of studies support the genocide claim, e.g. the most recent by Walter Richmond, mentioned earlier.<sup>418</sup> The use of the term genocide is also justified by Alexander Ohtov (2011). According to Hasan Dumanov, Doctor of History and Acting Head of Division of Social and Political Studies at the Kabardino-Balkarian Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences: “We cannot say that there was no genocide of the Circassian peoples; however, here again, the point is who is now benefitting from manipulation of this issue”.<sup>419</sup>

Assessing the number of victims is part of the documentation process. A number often referred to is that approximately half a million Circassians out of a population of between one and one and a half million died as a consequence of these actions (Natho 2009, 393; Richmond 2013, etc.). “Genocide staggers the imagination. It staggers us with numbers” (O’Neill and Hinton 1).<sup>420</sup>

Georgi M. Derluguian has elaborated on the role of the Armenian genocide in ethnic mobilisation - and other Caucasian cases of genocide: “The trauma of genocide produced among the victims’ families, and among their descendants, an exceedingly strong yearning for moral catharsis. Some of the most powerful ethnic mobilisations in the Caucasus occurred precisely in such groups: not only the Armenians but also, to a lesser extent, the Azeris, and then the Chechens, Karachai, and Balkars who had been deported by Stalin, as well as the Abkhazes who felt perennially embattled in the face of the much bigger Georgian nation” (Derluguian 2005, 187).<sup>421</sup> This underline of how the trauma of genocide can create a strong yearning for moral catharsis in the creation of ‘ethnic memories’ but the level of mobilisation, according to Derluguian, depends on two other factors. Firstly, different

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<sup>418</sup> According to Henze, genocide was “clearly attempted” (Henze 2007/2011, 373).

<sup>419</sup> Caucasian Knot (18-10-2010 - southosetia.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/15233).

<sup>420</sup> A website presents a graphic representation of the loss in numbers - comparing the population of Circassia and Egypt in the nineteenth century and today.

<sup>421</sup> Circassians played a role in the 1915 Armenian genocide in different ways, partly because a large part of the Circassians had been settled in Central Anatolia as a kind of buffer population vis-à-vis Armenians. It is remarkable that Derluguian does not mention the Circassian genocide in his book; today that would be unthinkable.

forms of catharsis other than simply retribution have been performed in a number of ways all over the former Soviet Union since 1991 - the case of the May 21 rituals and new monuments among the Circassian is an example of this (Derluguian 2005, 188). “Second, historical memory is a form of discourse that can have no material consequence unless it is linked to a chain of organisational resources and social mechanisms” (Derluguian 2005, 188). Individual trauma needs to be ‘channelled’ through organisations or other forms of initiatives that can formulate political goals.

In a context of mediated memorialisation and mobilisation, ‘genocide recognition’ can serve as an attractive catchphrase or slogan compared to the more general ‘recognition of our national tragedy’ - many peoples or nations can refer to a ‘tragedy’, while ‘genocide’ is more exceptional. It is a term that is easily understood and communicated and, as such, also well-suited to being promoted via the social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, where simple messages generally have a better chance. A narrative on victimisation appears to function much more strongly when linked to an agenda of genocide recognition - especially from a mobilisation perspective.<sup>422</sup> In spite of the dominance of the genocide agenda in recent years, the Circassian revival is generally about a broader type of recognition of the forced exile and its consequences for the Circassians - and about achieving wider recognition of Circassian culture and identity as contemporary issues of crucial importance to many Circassians.<sup>423</sup>

In a discussion on the ‘continued genocide’ against the Circassians, Alexander Ohtov refers to the continued division of the Circassians as different peoples living in different entities as an attempt at ‘ethnocide’ - a way of destroying a nation through forced assimilation (Ohtov 2011, 3).<sup>424</sup>

According to Ohtov, the administrative structures in the Circassian parts of the North Caucasus are generating the “destruction of the historical memory of the people” and the loss of “...language and culture, thus becoming nobody” (ibid).<sup>425</sup> According to Totten, Parsons and Hitchcock, “cultural

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<sup>422</sup> Some authors have referred to victimhood and victimisation as a ‘growth industry’. This could be the result of a shift from trauma as an issue regarded with suspicion (and shame) to today, where trauma is more widely accepted and can be as signal of authenticity (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009).

<sup>423</sup> In the foreword to the book ‘Sürgün/Circassian Exile 21 Mayıs/May 21 1864’ (Ankara 2011), the Chariman of Kafdav, Muhittin Ünal, states that the book marks a new era after 20 years of more amateurish publications. In this case, it has also entailed a stronger focus on the exile as an act of genocide.

<sup>424</sup> Ohtov refer to six areas in Russia where Circassians live.

<sup>425</sup> Larissa Dorogova also uses the term “continued genocide” about the contemporary situation (Conference presentation, Istanbul May 2012). The American historian Walter Richmond refers to the Sochi Olympics as a ‘continued genocide’ (Richmond 143). Chek and Haghor, from the Circassian Association in California, note in relation to the lack of archaeological excavations of the Olympic building projects that “the Olympics are unambiguously facilitating the destruction of physical evidence of genocide”(Chek and Haghor 2011, 15).

genocide and ethnocide are basically synonymous and refer to the destruction of a group's culture" (Totten, Parsons and Hitchcock 2002, 60).<sup>426</sup> The fear of a final loss of Circassian culture, especially due the widespread loss of the Circassian language, serves as a motivating factor for many of the Circassian activists.

As mentioned above, the provision and dissemination of documentation has played a key role in the process of working for genocide recognition since 2005. The documentation material has, since then, been further expanded, and has been indexed, digitalised and translated into other languages. This illustrates how memorialisation plays a key role in the renewed Circassian mobilisation, although this was also the case before 2005.<sup>427</sup> Today, the volume is significantly larger and a wider circle of individuals is actively producing content; there is now also a stronger focus on documentation.<sup>428</sup> Perhaps the most significant element of the ongoing Circassian revival is the fact that the contemporary Russian Federation - as the formal successor state to not just the Soviet Union but also the Russian Empire - has become a target of the aims of genocide recognition.

The role of documentation in the Circassian revival is similar to the processes of many other indigenous peoples around the globe that have suffered from forced displacement and other atrocities - often in relation to processes of colonisation. For instance, Linda Smith has stressed the importance of research in the revival of indigenous peoples. Smith further states that the Western discourse on post-colonialism reflects the dominance of a Western view, as there are still many places around the world where indigenous people are faced with a struggle for decolonisation. In many ways this corresponds to the challenges facing the renewed Circassian movement.

One illustration of the importance of documentation in relation to the campaign for genocide recognition has been the access granted to researchers from Circassian civil society organisations to former imperial archives in Tbilisi in Georgia - when access to similar and larger archives in

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<sup>426</sup> According to Chek and Haghori, a reinforced Russification of the North Caucasus has taken place in recent years, including increased official support for a Cossack revival in the region, which they see as a sign of an accelerating ethnocide of the indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus (Chek and Haghori 2011, 12).

<sup>427</sup> The role of genocide recognition in the Circassian revival - and not least the mediated part, especially on the Internet - can also be seen as an extension of the "new genre of memorialisation" created by the late twentieth-century films on the Holocaust ('Shoah' (1985) and 'Schindler's List' (1993), both of which were accompanied by renewed efforts to collect eyewitness reports, enlarging archives of documentation and enlightenment campaigns)(Alexander 2004b, 259).

<sup>428</sup> Alexander (2004b, 11) has stressed the role of carrier groups as "collective agents of the trauma process" in relation to "the cultural construction of trauma".

different parts of Russia was prohibited.<sup>429</sup> Since most of these sources are handwritten in the Russian language, they are not equally accessible to all and many of the documents are in a process of being translated into English and other languages. Corresponding research is taking place in Ottoman archives, where documents are mostly handwritten in the Turkish language using the Arabic alphabet. Subsequently, these are also gradually being translated into other languages. As it concerns a minority group, these processes mostly take place within the civil society sector - outside governmental institutions and without access to public funding - although some limited cooperation with republican research institutions in the North Caucasus does take place. It is also a priority of many of the Circassian organisations to publish and present the material from the archives to the wider public in the form of exhibitions, books, websites etc. - and to promote further use of this material by potential independent researchers.

The focus on documentation as part of the campaign for recognition of the Circassian genocide is included in the wider search for recognition and identity building among the Circassians. Just as with the Sochi Olympics, genocide recognition has become - internally as well as externally - a lever for increased Circassian mobilisation and memorialisation. This could indicate that the concerns sometimes voiced, that the genocide recognition agenda is too narrowly defined and could potentially lock the Circassian movement into a blind alley, are superfluous. The focus on genocide recognition seems to have generated further documentation and has thereby also served the needs of those interested in wider recognition of Circassian history and identity.

“Governments and other agencies usually state that the deaths of indigenous peoples were an ‘unintended consequence’ of certain actions, such as colonising remote areas, and that there were no planned efforts to destroy peoples on the basis of who they were” (Totten, Parsons and Hitchcock 2002, 70).<sup>430</sup> The lack of intention is often referred to in contemporary Russia, although an increasing amount of documentation is proving this argument highly doubtful. Addressing and countering some of the circulating myths has become a priority for many Circassian actors (Chek and Haghor 2011, 11). Two other examples of this type of myth should be mentioned. Firstly, that Circassians were killed by Turks on board Turkish ships - recent archive studies show that the ships

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<sup>429</sup> Parts of the Imperial Russian archives are in Tbilisi, as the present-day Georgian capital functioned in the nineteenth century as a regional administrative centre for the empire.

<sup>430</sup> Maybury-Lewis stresses that a distinction between ‘genocide’ and ‘genocidal massacre’ - more singular cases of slaughtering of indigenous people - is sometimes relevant (Maybury-Lewis 2002, 45).

came from different countries, but mostly from Russia.<sup>431</sup> And secondly, that Circassia and especially the Black Sea coastal area became part of the Russian Empire according to the Adrianople-peace treaty of 1829, when this land was transferred from the Ottoman Empire - in spite of the fact that the Ottoman Empire at that point possessed only a few trading posts along the Circassian coast. These myths are regularly transferred through the media in Russia and through, for instance, tourism on the Sochi Riviera, although a new generation of tourist guides is increasingly interested in providing more accurate versions of Circassian history in the area, and some of the training courses for tourist guides are trying to do this.<sup>432</sup>

Chek and Haghor complain about the misrepresentation of Circassian history in official Russian history writing, which they refer to as “in essence, a set of myths ... created to remove any culpability from Tsarist Russia for its crimes against the Circassian. These myths have become institutionalised to such a degree that even some Circassians themselves still believe them, despite conclusive evidence in the historical record that categorically disproves them.” (Chek and Haghor 2011, 10).<sup>433</sup> According to Chek and Haghor, “These myths are the primary instruments of genocide denial” (Chek and Haghor 2011, 11).<sup>434</sup>

Maybury-Lewis has stressed the importance of power relations and introduced the term ‘relative powerlessness’ in relation to many attempted genocides against indigenous peoples.<sup>435</sup> The case of the Circassians in the nineteenth century in many ways corresponds to this description, though not on all accounts - either historically or today. Historically, the Circassians were far from powerless as they fought a war that lasted 47 years, according to official Russian sources, and 101 years

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<sup>431</sup> Lists of ships, including numbers of Circassians on board, have been found in the Imperial Russian archives in Tbilisi, Georgia: [Circassian-genocide.com/TbilisiIndex.php](http://Circassian-genocide.com/TbilisiIndex.php); presented by Ali Bersek, from the Circassian Cultural Institute, New Jersey, at a conference in Anaklia, Georgia, May 2012, where copies of many of these documents were displayed in an exhibition.

<sup>432</sup> For instance, trained by the Sochi branch of the Russian Geographical Society (RGS), which has regularly protested against the environmental destruction resulting from many of the Olympic building projects. RGS in Sochi has also published a book on Circassian history in the region.

<sup>433</sup> Chek and Haghor themselves repeat a myth that is circulating among the Circassian diaspora: that the entire Circassian coast has “virtually no trace of Circassians”, referring to Oliver Bullough’s book: ‘Let our fame be great’ from 2010 (Chek and Haghor, 14).

<sup>434</sup> According to Chek and Haghor, one of these myths is the ‘voluntary union’ between the Circassians and Russia that was celebrated in 2007.

<sup>435</sup> “An overwhelming superiority in manpower, weapons and other technological means of support and a disproportionate use of power often characterise genocides towards indigenous peoples...” (Maybury-Lewis 2002, 43). Walter Richmond further adds that surrendering was often not accepted (Circassian Day, European Parliament, Brussels, 18-06-2012).

according to a Circassian understanding that is quickly gaining support now.<sup>436</sup> Great Britain's interest in the nineteenth-century Circassian resistance in terms of building potential alliances with the Circassians - though often coming from non-state or 'non-official diplomatic actors', also illustrates this kind of 'relative powerlessness'. On the one hand, Circassia and the Circassians were a potential ally of Great Britain, but in spite of many statements of interest from various public figures supporting Circassia during the course of several decades, in the end some form of friendly relationship with the large and powerful Russia rather than small Circassia was regarded as more important to British interests (Jaimoukha 2001, 70). This kind of 'relative powerlessness' therefore also illustrates the role of the Caucasus as a location in the geopolitics of the nineteenth century, when the region became a scene of renewed imperial competition. In this game of geopolitics, Imperial Russia was successful in achieving control over the Black Sea coast, which was regarded as a key objective for the long-term interests of the Empire. At any rate, this can be seen in the way this objective - in the end - sealed the fate of the Circassians.

It could also be argued that the contemporary Circassian mobilisation – which is increasingly taking the form of transnational cooperation - is showing signs of addressing this kind of 'relative powerlessness'. The lobbying efforts of some Circassian organisations towards, for instance, the parliaments of Georgia and Estonia, where some form of post-Soviet and post-Imperial solidarity with Circassian issues can be found, is an example thereof.<sup>437</sup> A number of Circassian civil society organisations played an important role in the process leading up to the recognition of the Circassian genocide by the Georgian parliament in 2011. The continued cooperation through, for instance, the Circassian Cultural Institute in Tbilisi and in relation to the 2012 revelation of the new monument to the nineteenth-century forced eviction of the Circassians from the Caucasus in Anaklia on the Georgian Black Sea coast are other examples of attempts at breaking-away from the situation of 'relative powerlessness' through new forms of lobbying and alliance-building. In other words, Circassian actors have increasingly become transnational players with increased possibilities of

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<sup>436</sup> It could be argued that it is precisely the strong Circassian resistance to the advancing Russian colonisation that ensured that a significant amount of knowledge about Circassia and the Circassians was circulated internationally - and arguably ensured an initial form of nation-state project which, in spite of never fully successfully materialising, still established a number of nation-state features that today play a significant role in the Circassian revival.

<sup>437</sup> Georgian President Mihail Sakashvili has also, on several occasions, criticised the Sochi Olympics and encouraged an international boycott.



alliance-building in the geopolitical games surrounding the Caucasus which, since the fall of the Soviet Union, has again become a region of competing geopolitical interests.<sup>438</sup>

The fact that setting an agenda on 'genocide recognition' can be a potentially powerful 'tool' to break away from the position of 'relative powerlessness' has been illustrated by the successful lobbying efforts of, for instance, Jewish and Armenian diaspora organisations. This type of framing of historical atrocities as genocide has, in these and other cases proven to be efficient in relation to both the intra-group redefinition of identity and towards the external mobilisation, including a targeting of the relevant contemporary authorities - such as Russia in the case of the Circassians.

Within the recent Circassian civil society mobilisation, the use of the Internet has played a key role. Circassian civil society actors have managed to enlarge and develop a new space for action - both among the diaspora and in Russia. It is important to stress that this is not just a virtual space. It includes the use of the Internet as both a means of publication of and campaigning for counter-versions of the Circassian identity and history - as seen in the case of promoting an understanding of the exile as genocide - and as a means of communication, coordination and cooperation between the Circassian organisations. The arrival and increased outreach of the social media of Web 2.0 has resulted in new forms of youth activism and has further resulted in a large number of discussions on the definition and understanding of Circassian history and identity on sites such as Facebook, YouTube etc. According to my assessment, the Circassian Internet mobilisation has led to what can be labelled a virtual re-territorialisation of Circassia (which I refer to as 'iCircassia').

According to a model developed by Maximillian Forte on the Internet-generated revival of indigenous people, the four key issues of this process are Visibility, Embodiment, Recognition and Authenticity. In the case of the ongoing Circassian mobilisation, these issues also constitute key elements of this process. After visiting and interviewing representatives from a number of Circassian organisations - especially among the diaspora - I can conclude that the word 'recognition' perhaps characterises the Circassian revival best of all. Recognition of not simply genocide but recognition on a number of different levels as a contemporary people of the Caucasus as well as an historical people of the Caucasus in the history books of the world - and especially

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<sup>438</sup> This type of phenomenon of new transnational forms of political influence has been termed 'frontier zones (of globalisation)' by Saskia Sassen.

those in Russia. In other words, this entails focusing on the second part of the ‘genocide recognition’ theme, which is generally discussed less than the more hyped-up term ‘genocide’.

The reports on the forced expulsion of the Circassians in the nineteenth century, which are today remediated and presented on the Internet, include testimonies and eyewitness reports of such graphic detail that the suffering becomes emotional and affective - in spite of being 150 years removed. Even without the use of photographs and video interviews with survivors, which have played a key role in the remediation of the Holocaust over the past few decades - as described by Geoffrey Hartman as part of a “quest to recover or reconstruct a recipient, an ‘affective community’ ... and [thus] the renewal of compassionate feelings” (Hartmann 1996, 153 - quoted from Alexander 2004, 260).

Moving from being a so-called ‘hidden people’ with a ‘forgotten history’, Circassians have now become frontrunners in a hyper-modern globalised transnational cosmopolitan way of life, in which new forms of media and communication are used for mobilisation and identity building.<sup>439</sup> And the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014, as connected to the defining moment in Circassian history and identity through the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, will ensure that the Circassian experiences of today as well of their past will become much more known in the so-called World Community.<sup>440</sup> A renewed so-called Circassian ‘master narrative’ has been developed on the basis of this understanding of Circassian history and identity. It is this renewed Circassian narrative that, in recent years, has increasingly been framed or referred to under the heading of ‘the Circassian Genocide’.

In conclusion, the new Circassian organisations of the post-2005 generation have successfully initiated and continuously managed to set an agenda focusing on genocide recognition - assisted by the issue of the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

## Conclusion

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<sup>439</sup> This is also a period when several of the classical cultural markers such as the Circassian language and the traditions of dances and music no longer have the same position that they used to. While this could be considered - at least partly - an effect of globalisation, the actions of the Circassian organisations and activists could be seen as a way of using other elements of the era of globalisation to compensate for these effects - in a redirected and modernised manner.

<sup>440</sup> On the role of defining moment, see Huttenbach (1995, 673). On the potential power of ‘genocide recognition’, Tony Kushner has stated that the Holocaust constitutes the defining moment of the 20th century (Kushner 2004, 254).

In combination with the Sochi 2014 Olympics, the issue of Circassian genocide recognition has contributed to elevating the so-called Circassian Question into a transnational issue that has also penetrated the agenda of the mainstream media in Russia - and elsewhere. This has been illustrated by reactions from politicians and various expert observers from the federal Russian centre. 'Sochi' has become a long-distance site of memory among Circassians worldwide, especially among the diaspora, where Sochi as a contemporary and concrete Caucasian space has become a symbol of the lost homeland, including the tragedy of war and forced expulsion that is now widely referred to as the Circassian genocide. The many references to the historical as well as the contemporary homeland in the Caucasus on the Internet, in the form of blogs, discussion forums, social media etc., can be termed a virtual re-territorialisation. They thus share a number of similarities with various decolonisation processes from different parts of the world - and with post-colonial efforts known in relation to other post-imperial contexts.<sup>441</sup>

I find, in my analysis, that the decision to host the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi has played a key role, perhaps *the* key role, in creating a new unity among Circassians on the use of the term 'genocide' as the joint heading or title of what was previously often referred to as the nineteenth-century tragedy of the Circassians. The arrival of the Sochi Olympics has completed the triangle of constantly increasing Circassian mobilisation, in which the two other fixed points are 'May 21 (1864)' and 'genocide recognition'. These three issues have shown an ability to mutually reinforce each other and create a constantly increases memorialisation and mobilisation that continuously enhance the Circassian revival.<sup>442</sup> The 2014 Sochi Olympics, as an international mega event, has in this way, significantly contributed to accelerating the Circassian level of memorialisation and mobilisation - within Russia and other national contexts as well as transnationally. In conclusion, 'genocide recognition' has become the new framing of the Circassian revival, and this is largely the result of Circassian civil society action and mobilisation. The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics play a key role as a 'facilitating event' that has contributed to making the Circassian revival more visible - among Circassians internally as well as the world at large. It appears as though the Sochi Olympics have exponentially increased not just the visibility of Circassian issues but also the level of

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<sup>441</sup> As Linda T. Smith notes, the term post-colonial indicates that the world has become decolonised, while in reality indigenous peoples are often still fighting a colonial heritage that they often experience as marginalising or discriminating (Smith 1999, 98).

<sup>442</sup> What we see in the Circassian memorialisation and counter-memorialisation process is simply the establishment of Sochi as a symbol of a lost homeland that is often mythologized.

involvement of ‘ordinary’ Circassians on a day-to-day level. The significantly increased role of the Internet - including social media such as Facebook and YouTube - has played a key role in this process.

Although the term ‘genocide’ has a fairly precise meaning in international law, it has been highly disputed by governments. The term has, nevertheless, been used more broadly by a number of organisations, Circassian ones included, and played a significant role in mobilising against authoritarian or suppressive regimes.

The Circassian genocide marks a particular Caucasian context in which different types of genocide intersect: ‘genocide of indigenous people’ and the ‘classical (East) European borderland genocides’, labelled as Bloodlands by Timothy Snyder (2010). The Caucasus also belonged to a zone in which modern imperial competition and collapse unfolded while new forms of population policies were introduced. All in all, in terms of genocidal policies and methods, the Caucasus region - by extension - can be categorised as part of the Bloodlands.

Genocide recognition has largely functioned as a tool for mobilisation among the Circassians, simultaneously including historical documentation and memorialisation in general. As such, genocide recognition can be seen as a tool for achieving what I regard as a key overall purpose of the Circassian revival - to attain wider recognition as an historical as well as a contemporary people, with a belonging centred on an historical homeland in the in the north-western Caucasus.

There is no doubt that genocide recognition is a powerful way of framing an historical trauma and functions as a powerful tool for generating internal mobilisation among co-Circassians (and sometimes including a wider circle of Caucasians). This illustrates the power of ‘identity politics’ in collective mobilisation - something that has been so significant in the post-Soviet sphere.

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## Chapter 9

### Sochi as a Site of Circassian Long-distance Memorialisation

The following examples of slogans have been used by the revitalised Circassian movement since the end of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics.<sup>443</sup>

*“No Sochi Olympics on the graves of our ancestors”*

*“Sochi - the land of genocide” and*

*“You’ll be skiing on mass graves in Sochi.”*

This rhetorical linking of Sochi—and the 2014 Winter Olympics—with “Circassian mass graves” has proven to be a powerful combination in the increasingly transnational Circassian mobilisation of recent years. Another more elaborate example is from an editorial in the Circassian journal *Isthmus*:

*The Sochi Olympics 2014 will mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Circassian genocide. On May 21, 1864, Russia declared the end of the Russo-Circassian war and the complete occupation of Circassia. The event that marked the end of the war was the fall of Sochi, the final frontier and the last capital of Circassia, all survivors of the massacre faced a mass exodus executed by the Russian government under such harsh conditions that most of them didn’t survive. Sochi was also the place that Circassians were exiled from, the largest diaspora proportionally in the world still lives outside of their homeland, and the Sochi Olympics is the final step of the Circassian genocide. Fully erasing the bloody history of Sochi and the Circassians.*<sup>444</sup>

The new role of Sochi in the ongoing Circassian civil society mobilisation is no longer voiced only in relation to the annual Circassian commemorative events and demonstrations (held on May 21), that year by year have gained more and more support among Circassians around the world; it is also strengthened by the significantly increased level of Circassian action on the Internet.

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<sup>443</sup> May21.org, noSochi2014.com, circassianculturalinstitute.org, caucasusforum.org. Other examples of protests against the Sochi Olympics are BoycottSochi.eu, AntiSochi.org and facebook.com/BoycottOlympics2014.

<sup>444</sup> “The Genocide Continues”. *Isthmus* No. 3, 2010. (Published by Circassian Cultural Institute, New Jersey.)



Circassians are an indigenous people of the North Caucasus who speak a unique Northwest-Caucasian language. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, the southward expansion of the Russian Empire resulted in a renewed war between the Russian army and the Circassians.<sup>445</sup> At the time, Imperial Russia's possession of the Caucasus was widely regarded both as a potential threat to the interests of Great Britain (and its allies) in the Middle East—as well as a threat to the geopolitical dominance of Great Britain in general. This led to discussions of potential British support for the Circassian resistance, which were often referred to in British and European media as the Circassian Question. Several British actors, officially and unofficially, visited Circassia in the mid-nineteenth century and took part in establishing a joint Circassian nation-building project as part of supporting the resistance against Russia (Jaimoukha 2001, 70).<sup>446</sup> Prior to this, a pre-modern Circassia had existed as a type of loose confederation of provinces without a central government.<sup>447</sup> During many decades of war, lowland villages and crops were systematically burned in order to force Circassians into the mountains, where their resistance could be weakened by illness and a lack of food. The blockade of the Circassian Black Sea coast, maintained by Russia for decades until the final victory in 1864, resulted in widespread hunger and disease. The Circassian province, where Sochi is located, was called Ubykhia, and it was the last district of historical Circassia to be defeated by the Imperial Russian army in 1864.<sup>448</sup> As a result Ubykhia and the Ubykhians have a specific status in the renewed narrative on Circassian history (and victimisation)—often including the story on the death of the last Ubykh-speaking person in 1992 in Turkey. The Circassians presently found in Sochi are mainly urbanised Shapsugs from the Shapsugia province, north of Ubykhia.

Circassians were presented with the choice either of resettling in the lowlands north of the Kuban River or of going into exile in Ottoman Turkey. Most of the surviving Circassians felt forced to go

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<sup>445</sup> After the fall of the Soviet Union, Circassian actors began to rename and re-periodise the war between Russia and Circassia from just constituting a (often hidden or misrepresented) part of the “Caucasian Wars” from 1817 to 1864, which is the term mostly used in Russia, into the “Russian-Circassian War” from 1763 to 1864.

<sup>446</sup> A number of British actors spent what were often long periods in Circassia in the 1830s and took an active part in promoting political unity among the Circassian tribes in their war against Russia. This included promoting international recognition of Circassia as a nation-state and the design of the joint Circassian flag that has a key position in the contemporary Circassian revival. Several of these British actors wrote books about their periods in Circassia, which today constitute key historical and ethnographical knowledge that is often remediated and re-circulated on the Internet.

<sup>447</sup> Most of the Circassian provinces could be labelled as feudal while some had a more egalitarian structure.

<sup>448</sup> During the nineteenth century wars, Ubykhia increasingly became a part of the united Circassian resistance and eventually came to be regarded as a Circassian province, although earlier Ubykhia had often been regarded as an independent unit. Linguistically Ubykh constitutes a separate category parallel to Western Circassian and Eastern Circassian (Kabardian). Together with Abkhazian, they constitute the group of Northwestern Caucasian languages.

into exile. However, which neither Russia nor the Ottoman Empire was prepared for this; hundreds of thousands of Circassians perished under extremely harsh conditions during the exodus at both shores of the Black Sea. Many Circassian actors who protest against the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014 now seek recognition of this process as an act of genocide.<sup>449</sup> Notably, 2014 will mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the forced displacement, further enhancing the ongoing Circassian revival.

Since the mid-2000s, a renewed transnational Circassian revival has gradually accelerated. Consequently an expression widely known and used in the nineteenth century has returned: the Circassian Question.<sup>450</sup> The current Circassian civil society mobilisation began when, in the mid-2000s, a number of new organisations began to appear—both inside Russia and in many of the countries where the diaspora are settled. Several of these organisations co-signed an appeal to the Russian Parliament for recognition of the forced Circassian exile from the Caucasus in the nineteenth century as an act of genocide. This marked the beginning of a new phase of Circassian mobilisation, which was further enhanced when, in 2007, Russia was chosen to host of the 2014 Winter Olympics, to take place in Sochi.<sup>451</sup> One of the first responses from the Circassian organisations was to establish the website OlympicGenocide.net, which later became NoSochi2014.com; the website was developed and maintained in cross-border cooperation among an increasing number of Circassian civil society organisations.

Civil society mobilisation through youth activism and the use of the Internet constitutes a key element of the Circassian revival (Hansen 2012, 122). Circassian civil society actors have managed to develop a new space for action—both in Turkey, and to a lesser extent, in Russia as the two main states to consider in the Circassian context. This includes a use of the Internet both as a means of publication and campaigning for counter-versions of Circassian identity and history (as seen in the

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<sup>449</sup> In Russia this is widely referred to as “unintentional” (cf. Sergei Markedonov, political scientist, in Caucasian Knot 2010). This viewpoint is increasingly undermined by research that includes documentation from archives that hitherto have been difficult to get access to: for instance research results presented by the American historian Walter Richmond at conferences in May 2012 in Anaklia, Georgia and in June 2012 in Brussels, Belgium; the results are presented in the book *The Circassian Genocide* (2013).

<sup>450</sup> Sometimes also referred to as the Circassian Issue or the Circassian Problem. Such designations have often been used in relation to indigenous peoples or peripheral geographies in a manner similar Edwards Said’s definition of the term Orientalism. Assigning indigenous groups as a “problem” or a “question” according to Linda T. Smith is one of the degrading practices of colonialism (Smith 1999, 90). The Circassian Question was largely interpreted as part of the so-called Eastern Question in the nineteenth century—the competition between Britain and Russia over influence in the Middle East and beyond, that has also been referred to as the Victorian Cold War or the Great Game.

<sup>451</sup> According to Sufian Zhemukhov (2009) the Circassian Question was “practically dormant” until Russia won the Olympic bid in 2007.

case of promoting the understanding of the exile as an act of genocide) and as a means of communication, coordination and cooperation between Circassian organisations. The arrival of the social media of Web 2.0, together with the increased outreach of the Internet, has resulted in new forms of youth activism and in a large number of discussions on sites such as Facebook and YouTube on the meaning of Circassian identity.

The increased level of mobilisation among Circassian diaspora youth has come as a surprise to some observers, not only because this is the first generation that no longer speaks the Circassian language, but partly also because some of the cultural traditions, that had survived and unfolded in rural communities through more than a century in exile, had been lost during the relocation to large urban entities (Hansen 2013, 97). A number of Circassian youth activists have shown that reproduced representations of Circassian history and identity are still central to most of their actions and priorities, while at the same time they challenge the operational modus of older organisations. Many Circassian and Caucasian youth activists are inspired by international civil society trends to integrate social media and the Internet in their activities.

### **Circassian Counter-Memorialisation**

Since 2005, a renewed Circassian memorialisation process has become a key element of Circassian civil society mobilisation and has increasingly taken the form of a counter-memorialisation targeting official Russian historiography, which today prescribes an understanding of Circassian inclusion into Imperial Russia as voluntary. This is not only opposed by most Circassians but is also generally rejected by most international research—including a number of Russian scholars—on the issue.

The French historian, Pierre Nora, has contributed to the discussion on the role of minorities or ethnic groups in relation to the “memory turn”—by referring to this type of memorialisation processes as an “emancipator trend” and as part of a “democratisation of history”. Nora suggests two main reasons behind this outbreak of memory. The first reason is the “acceleration of history” as reflected in, for example, media, books, museums, tourism and historical re-enactments. Nora describes the second reason as follows:

*A second reason for this outbreak of memory is of a social nature and is linked to what might be called, by analogy with “acceleration”, the “democratisation” of history. This takes the form of a marked emancipator trend among peoples, ethnic groups and even certain classes of individuals in the world today; in short, the emergence, over a very short period of time, of all those forms of memory bound up with minority groups for whom rehabilitating their past is part and parcel of reaffirming their identity (Nora 2002, 5).*

This leads Nora to define “minority memories” as part of three types of “decolonisation”: international, domestic and ideological. The latter is the most relevant with regard to the Circassian context as it addresses the context of a totalitarian past where “liberated peoples” had “long-term memories confiscated, destroyed or manipulated” (Nora 2002, 5).<sup>452</sup> Nevertheless, “international decolonisation” is also relevant in the Circassian context: International decolonisation, which has allowed societies previously stagnating in the ethnological inertia of colonial oppression access to historical consciousness and the rehabilitation (or fabrication) of memories (Nora 2002, 5). This links to the pre-Soviet era of the Russian Empire as addressed by the documentation and research efforts prioritised by many Circassian organisations and their partners. A revised “domestic decolonisation” is in many ways what Circassian actors are asking for. On the one hand, these types of decolonisation frame the Circassian memorialisation efforts as part of a redefinition of minority memories in a democratisation and emancipation perspective. On the other hand, they also illustrate that this struggle for “decolonisation” continues in the case of the Circassian revival.

According to Michael Rothberg, there is a widespread understanding of collective memory as a zero-sum game that promotes the understanding of memory as competitive: “Fundamental to the conception of competitive memory is a notion of the public sphere as a pre-given, limited space in which already-established groups engage in a life-and-death struggle” (Rothberg 2009, 5). If not literally a life-and-death struggle, this understanding of competitive memory corresponds in many ways to the wider Russian as well as to the North Caucasian contexts more specifically. There is a significant reluctance on the federal level to accept the ongoing redefinition of Circassian memory and identity, as illustrated by celebrations, held in 2007, of the 450-year anniversary of the “voluntary” union between Russia and the Circassians (see below).<sup>453</sup> Ten years earlier, similar

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<sup>452</sup> This refers to, for instance, the former Communist countries and some of the totalitarian regimes in Latin America in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>453</sup> “The challenges of the Sochi Olympics and Russia’s Circassian problem” (North Caucasus Analysis 2007); “Circassian outrage at anniversary plans.” (IWPR 2006).

celebrations were cancelled after being rejected as false by a commission of historians from different parts of Russia.<sup>454</sup> In a similar vein, Circassian actors complain that their history as an indigenous people of the area is disregarded in the extensive Sochi Olympic presentation material.<sup>455</sup> This reluctance of the federal centre could illustrate the increasing authoritarian tendencies, including attempts to control civil society and ethnic minorities (Orttung 2012, 2).<sup>456</sup>

In recent years, Circassian actors have shown that additional public spheres or counter-publics can be developed and, if successful, manage to extend into the wider federal public sphere of Russia (Fraser 1990 and 2007). This has largely been possible due to the interest generated by the 2014 Winter Olympics as a forthcoming mega sports event that, by definition, is transnational. The new forms of activism, including transnational cooperation and the use of new communication technologies, could prove to be a new challenge for the Russian system of “managed democracy”. A significant element of Russian governance during the Putin era has been containing, for example, civil society, ethnic revival and political opposition into controllable and manageable pockets, characterised by a reduced visibility in relation to the larger public sphere of Russia. The December 2011 Russian elections showed that civil society protesting, as well as using new social media and the Internet more generally, could set a wider national agenda on democratisation.<sup>457</sup> Still, President Putin won a resounding victory in the March 2012 election; subsequently, the space for action of civil society actors has, on several accounts, been reduced.<sup>458</sup> The new visibility generated by the Circassian mobilisation contains elements similar to those used in the protests against election fraud which penetrated the otherwise tightly government-controlled public sphere of Russia in the winter 2011-2012.

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<sup>454</sup> “Outrage at “fake” Circassian anniversary.” (IWPR 2007); “Russia: imperial anniversary challenged in North Caucasus” (Radio Free Europe 2007).

<sup>455</sup> The Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics was also criticised by local indigenous people on several accounts, although the degree of indigenous inclusion was considerably higher than in the case of the Sochi Olympics.

<sup>456</sup> According to the annual Freedom House report on Russia 2012, Russia is classified as a “Consolidated Authoritarian Regime” (Orttung 2012).

<sup>457</sup> Sometimes referred to as the Russian Spring. The difficulties of civil society protesting in Russia were further illustrated by the court case and conviction of the members of the Pussy Riot group during the summer of 2012, that generated significant international media coverage. A new anti-Sochi Olympics initiative was launched during this period, including a campaign with a drawing of the Olympic rings in handcuffs with the text “Pussia Sochi 2014” (“Boycott Russian Olympics 2014” on Facebook.com, upstart on August 17, 2012).

<sup>458</sup> A 2012 law in Russia demands civil society organisations that receive funding from donors abroad to formally register this as support from “foreign agents”. This is for instance used to imprison activists from organisations, that receive funds from international donor to different projects, for taking part in demonstrations that are labelled as, for instance, “mass riots” (Voice of America 2012).

From the perspective of many Circassian actors, the Sochi Olympics are perceived either as a deliberate omission or as an act of enforced forgetting.<sup>459</sup> Notions of “hidden history” or “suppressed history” play an important role in the contemporary processes of redefining “Circassianness” (Cohen 1997, 235).<sup>460</sup> The Circassian historical (as well as contemporary) presence in the region being ignored in the extensive Olympic material motivates and generates increased mobilisation among the Circassians. One such example is when Greek colonies on the Black Sea coast two thousand years ago are mentioned, while the Circassians as an indigenous people of the area are disregarded.<sup>461</sup> With the spreading of the Internet the process of counter-acting to enforced forgetting has accelerated, resulting in an increased involvement of additional Circassian activists.

Developed by Pierre Nora, “sites of memory” is another term that has gained prominence as one aspect of the memory turn, especially since the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Nora 1997, 1). A “site of memory” can be a concrete geographical place, a symbolic link to a place that once existed, or a historical event.<sup>462</sup> In any case, the spatial dimension of memorialisation is often at the centre of discussions, although it usually constitutes a more complex phenomenon than just a spatial representation.<sup>463</sup> Sochi as a renewed site of memory within the Circassian memorialisation process has increasingly become part of the rituals and performances carried out by Circassians in relation to the annual May 21 events. The rituals and performances on the Internet have become a year-round phenomenon that peak on May 21. The Circassian diaspora’s use of a redefined site of memory in a distant historical homeland has similarities with various post-colonial memorialisation processes. The role of activists and civil society organisations in the Circassian memorialisation process demonstrates the relevance of the terms “vernacular memory”

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<sup>459</sup> “Putin IOC speech - lies about the Sochi Olympics - Hiding the truth of Circassian genocide” (YouTube.com 2011). Sometimes also referred to as cultural genocide or ethnocide ([massviolence.org/Ethnocide](http://massviolence.org/Ethnocide)).

<sup>460</sup> Sefer Berzeg for instance refers to the Circassian village of “Socha” that was bombarded and destroyed by the Russian navy in 1830 and then replaced with the fortress Navaginski in 1838, that later become the city of Sochi (named in 1896, formal town status in 1917) (Berzeg Undated). Both are named after the Sochi river that is generally regarded as of Circassian/Caucasian origin though opposing versions can be found.

<sup>461</sup> “Full version of Putin speech (2014 Winter Olympics)”. Youtube.com (2007). For a Circassian YouTube-response, see note 18.

<sup>462</sup> Nora’s term focuses especially both on geographical locations including, for instance, monuments, celebrations or rituals linked to certain sites, archives, etc. and on issues such as celebrations, historical persons or symbols such as flags or languages.

<sup>463</sup> Other concepts such as cultural heritage, historical consciousness and identity building are related to the term “sites of memory”.

and “official memory” as protests against official Russian history writing are at the centre of Circassian efforts (Bodnar 1992, 15).<sup>464</sup>

Transnational long-distance belonging to a historical homeland constitutes one of the key characteristics of diaspora groups (e.g., Safran 1991, 83).<sup>465</sup> This element of long-distance belonging has evolved into a transnational community-building process that includes a strongly increased level of cross-border exchange—whether of social, cultural, economic or political character (Van Hear 1998, 6). The intense interest in discussing their historical homeland on the Internet illustrates an increasing diversity in the memorialisation and renegotiation of homeland perceptions among diaspora Circassians, most of whom have never visited the Caucasus. In 1998, the anthropologist Seteney Shami (1998, 642) characterised this changed relationship to the homeland as a shift from a mythological homeland towards a concrete territory, but I will argue both that this is a process that continues today and that this affected, at most, only a small percentage of Circassians in 1998. The Circassian diaspora’s actions on the Internet have become so widespread that they can be labelled as a virtual re-territorialisation, indicating a re-establishment of connections and a sense of belonging, that challenge the state where this historical homeland is located today (Hansen 2009). Certain actors within Russian media and politics perceive this as a challenge, and they have responded by calling the Circassian diaspora’s actions “external” or “foreign” interference. Still, the Circassian diaspora actors’ combining of “Sochi” and “May 21 (1864)” is a “double long-distance counter-memorialisation” that brings together representations both of time and of space in a strong symbolic illustration: “Sochi 1864-2014”.

It is not surprising that mega events such as the Sochi Winter Games generate counter-actions (which can be labelled “counter-branding”) from organisations focussing on, for instance, environmental protection or indigenous peoples’ rights.<sup>466</sup> Such protests are often regarded as

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<sup>464</sup> The three Circassian republics in many ways constitute an in-between category in this respect. On the one hand the republican leaders take part in official celebrations of 450 years of voluntary union and publicly flag slogans of the United Russia party saying “together forever”, while at the same time balancing the wordings in statements in relation to the annual May 21 commemorative events. These official Russian versions are simultaneously countered by research and publications from local republican research institutes.

<sup>465</sup> For instance, Benedict Anderson, Schiller and Fouron (2001, 4) have written on the role of long-distance nationalism but this is only one of several aspects of the revival of the long-distance relationship among the Circassian diaspora. This is also illustrated by the five different categories or strands of the Circassian movement identified by Sufian Zhemukhov (2012, 511), of which “nationalism” is but one.

<sup>466</sup> One element of the Circassian counter-branding is constituted by reference to the name “Krasnaya Polyana”—the location in the mountains where the downhill skiing events will take place and the planned location of Russian winter sport tourism after the Olympic Games (Mountain Cluster). This name can be translated as “Red Meadow”, or as one

hostile or against the interests of the nation in countries such as the Russian Federation, where the process of democratic transition towards diversity, pluralism and a non-restricted civil society has, arguably, receded. Resistance and protests have become part and parcel of all mega-sport events, and the Olympic Games are regularly met with various counter-actions (Jarvie 2012, 428). Another type of resistance directly and wholly oriented towards the Olympics is the Counter Olympics Network (CON), which was organised as a network of organisations in which individuals with diverse interests cooperated to protest against a number of issues relating to the 2012 London Olympics.<sup>467</sup>

The aforementioned official celebrations of 450 years of voluntary union between Circassians and Russia in 2007 constitute a key example of the role of contested or competing memory in the Circassian mobilisation.<sup>468</sup> Many Circassian activists refer to the 450-year celebrations as part of their motivation to become actively involved in the Circassian revival—often in combination with the Sochi Olympics.<sup>469</sup> On October 4, 2007, the first transnationally coordinated demonstration took place in Istanbul and New York, where protesters stressed the connection between ignoring the Circassians in the Sochi Olympics project and promoting the understanding of a violent, forced exodus as voluntary unity. A huge triumphal arch, modelled after the one in Paris, was erected in Nalchik, in the North Caucasus, for the celebrations of the 450-year anniversary.<sup>470</sup> Further, a large federal budget for concerts, cultural festivals and publications in all the Circassian republics was allocated from Moscow connected to the anniversary celebrations.<sup>471</sup>

These large-scale celebrations were carried out despite the cancellation of similar celebrations ten years earlier, when a commission of Russian historians of different ethnicity concluded it would be more appropriate to refer to these historical events as violent wars and forced evictions rather than

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person has suggested, “Blood-Red Clearing” (in comments to <http://nosochi2014.com/press-release/index.php>, 27-7-2012).

<sup>467</sup> During the 2012 London Olympics, ICON (the International Counter Olympics Network) was launched with the intention of continuing the joint efforts as a transnational network-based cooperation (CounterOlympicsNetwork 2012).

<sup>468</sup> In an article on NoSochi2014.com, a Circassian writer from Turkey, Sefer Berzeg, refers to the 450-year anniversary celebrations as the “production of a factitious history thesis” (Berzeg Undated).

<sup>469</sup> Sochi has been subject to similar historical reassessments. For instance in relation to the official 150-year anniversary of Sochi in the late 1980s: “The Russian Academy of Sciences’ Institute of History announced that 1838 was not the founding year of Sochi but the date of its conquest by Russian troops (the Circassians recaptured it after the Crimean War but lost it again in 1864)”, as the leaders of a Shapsug organisation in the region pointed out in 2008 (Zhemukhov 2009). This is still ignored in many tourist guide-books and other tourist guide narratives.

<sup>470</sup> The arch is located in a roundabout on the main road north towards central Russia. Fifty years earlier, the so-called Maria-statue at the central square in Nalchik was erected to celebrate the 400-year anniversary.

<sup>471</sup> \$ 7 million according to Fatima Tlisova (2007).



as “voluntary unity”. The official Russian version was also countered by the erection of a monument in remembrance of the Circassian victims in the war between 1763 and 1864 in a central park of Nalchik. The statue is formed like a tree, and it’s called the “Tree of Life” in reference to an old Circassian legend—it has become a focal point for the annual Circassian May 21 events.<sup>472</sup> Many monuments in the Caucasus in general are a noteworthy factor in the Circassian revival that illustrates the role of competing and contested memorialisation in the region. An example of this is the many monuments in the North Caucasus of Russian generals that took part in the colonisation the region in the nineteenth century. In Lazerevskoe (in the greater Sochi area), Circassian activists have on several occasions attacked the statue of Admiral Lazarev, who they regard as responsible for assaults and killings of Circassians including civilians.<sup>473</sup>

Circassian memorialisations have also involved a context of competing monuments along the Black Sea coast with the Sochi Rivera at the centre, in many ways a classic post-Soviet memorialisation dispute.<sup>474</sup> One act of potential and/or partly official recognition of Circassian history in the area is the decision to construct a monument depicting three persons including a Circassian and a Cossack shaking hands (plus also an Armenian) by the Sochi Airport in Adler. This type of monument, many of which can still be found in the Caucasus, was used by the Soviet leaders to illustrate the friendship of peoples united by Soviet communism. Representatives of the main Circassian association on the Black Sea coast reject the suggested monument at Sochi Airport as representing a historical lie: a bloody war was fought between the Circassians and the Cossacks, who were part of the advancing Imperial Russian Army that rewarded them with the land formerly belonging to the Circassians.<sup>475</sup> To many Circassians, this was another example of the official Russian history manipulating the narrative of the Circassians. Whether this monument actually will be erected is still not clear.

Shortly after the Soviet Union fell in 1991, a monument commemorating the expulsion of the Circassians and the Abkhazians was established in Krasnaya Polyana, where alpine skiing events

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<sup>472</sup> The competing memorialisation has become visible in the urban space of Nalchik.

<sup>473</sup> To many Circassians the very name of the city of Lazerevskoe is seen as an insult, that constantly remind them about the tragedies of the nineteenth century (as does also the name of Sochi).

<sup>474</sup> The greater Sochi area—sometimes referred to as the Sochi Riviera or the Russian Riviera—is a 142 kilometre long urban settlement that in the tourism promotion often is referred to as Europe’s largest coastal town or urbanised area (second in the world only to San Francisco). It is this coastline that most of the tourism activities in Sochi are orientated towards, supplemented with especially Krasnaya Polyana and Abkhazia.

<sup>475</sup> Information retrieved in the Caucasus by the author in 2009.

will occur during the Winter Olympics. However, after a few years, the Sochi authorities ordered it removed and subsequently the monument was relocated to the Black Sea coast in Abkhazia, where it presently stands. Another monument commemorating the eviction of the Circassians was presented to the public in Anaklia, Georgia (close to Abkhazia on the Black Sea coast) on May 21, 2012.<sup>476</sup> This is yet another example of the increased transnationalisation of the competing memorialisations surrounding the Circassian Question, especially along the Black Sea coast. Moreover, it marks a “second step” following the Georgian Parliament’s official recognition of the Circassian genocide in 2011.

A new initiative in the tourism sector in Sochi, including significant elements of renewed Circassian memorialisation, resulted in the Circassian village Bolshoi Kichmai, outside Sochi, becoming the “hit of the season” in 2011. This one-day bus-trip is advertised all over Sochi as either “33 waterfalls” or “evening show” on posters showing Circassian dancers.<sup>477</sup> The waterfalls have been a tourist attraction in the Sochi area for many years but now include an evening show of Circassian dances performed by professional dancers from the Adygeya Republic, which is located on the other side of Caucasian mountain range. The name Circassian (or Caucasian) is not mentioned on the posters, which show Circassian dancers dressed in traditional Caucasian costumes.<sup>478</sup> These relatively new tourist initiatives are referred to by some of the initiators in the village as “ethno-tourism”, and they have become very successful in just a few years: often more than one thousand tourists visit the village every day. This development has revitalised Bolshoi Kichmai, generated many new jobs and managed to stop its depopulation. As part of this process, the village now has five museums with many exhibited items signalling “authenticity” by linking to historical Circassian village life.<sup>479</sup> Authenticity and local belonging are also signalled by the presentations of the tamada, the Circassian man who functions as a storyteller by linking together the different dance

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<sup>476</sup> The Georgian involvement has been labelled by some as an attempt at dividing the usual solidarity between Circassians and Abkhazians (Jaimoukha 2001, 82). They generally regard each other as brothering peoples, and intermarriages often take place within the diaspora in Turkey, where Circassian and Abkhazian villages have often been located in the same areas and where Circassians and Abkhazians were part of the same cultural associations.

<sup>477</sup> In Russian. By 2011 the language used in the tourist sector in Sochi is predominantly Russian.

<sup>478</sup> The Kuban Cossacks have, in the former centuries, taken inspiration from the male dress of the Caucasian Mountaineers named after the Circassians: The Cherkesska. The casual tourist of the Sochi Riviera is often unable to notice the difference. As a Circassian from Sochi ironically noted in 2009, “The most Circassian part of the Sochi Olympics will be the costume on the ‘Cossacks’ greeting new arrivals at the Sochi Airport”. (p.c.)

<sup>479</sup> Approximately ten Circassian villages are located in this area which, before 1864, was part of the Shapsugia province in Circassia. A Shapsug National district also existed from 1924 to 1945 (Natho 2009, 414). Since all villages were burnt during the war and colonisation, and all remaining Circassians were forced to move to the northern plains, the present-day Circassian villages in the area were established by Shapsugs, who managed to return to the area and establish new villages from the 1870s.

numbers of the shows. The tamada generally avoid mentioning “1864” and the nineteenth century war—perhaps because most of the spectators are ethnic Russians—but he still presents Circassian history and traditions in the region with dignity, which is a general aim among the organisers of the tourism initiatives in the village. The local belonging is further emphasised by incorporating Circassian legends, most of which are linked to the region.<sup>480</sup> Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number of published books and booklets on Circassian issues in Sochi; many of these are published on the other side of the Caucasus mountain range in the Republic of Adygeya, but also distributed in Sochi. This story of successful “ethno-tourism” in a Circassian village is an example of how Circassian spaces have become enlarged these years—not only on the Internet.<sup>481</sup> Several other villages and towns are considering similar tourism projects, some of which are regarded as problematic due to the lack of proximity to Sochi. The tourism sector in Sochi remains predominantly oriented towards a post-Soviet market, but one of the goals of the Sochi Olympics is to attract European tourists, among others, in the immediate future (Kreiten 2011, 350). All things considered, tourism-related trends would increase knowledge of Circassian history in the region.

For the Circassian diaspora, local Circassian names of rivers, valleys and mountains, as well as old Circassian legends of the land, are examples of a hidden or forgotten history that has almost disappeared.<sup>482</sup> Most local Circassians on the Black Sea coast still possess this knowledge, and tourist-guides in the region sometimes refer to the origin of these names and often convey stories of the local legends (though often only elements hereof). The level of included information—and correct information—on Circassian history and contemporary presence in tourist guide books and brochures still varies significantly, although it appears to be increasing alongside tourism in

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<sup>480</sup> The Russian Geographical Society (RGS)—that, in the nineteenth century, was a part of the Russian imperial apparatus of colonisation—is today an NGO that provides knowledge that otherwise might have been suppressed or ignored. The Sochi branch takes part in training of tourist guides, and it has published books showing a more inclusive approach to the indigenous peoples’ history in the area than is the case of the Olympic project. This includes, for instance, the books *The History of the Ubykhs* by B.I. Vorishilov (2008) and *Caucasian Names, Titles and Legends* by A.V. Tverdyi (2008). The knowledge on Circassian history transmitted by tourist guides varies significantly. Many tourist guides still have limited knowledge on local history. Still, they often refer—as part of the stream of information passed on to tourists during excursions—to names of rivers, valleys and mountains as being of Circassian origin.

<sup>481</sup> The successful introduction of Circassian “ethno-tourism” appears to be spreading, with proposals to develop new Circassian villages for tourism in the Anapa-region (two hundred kilometres north of Sochi) and in the above-mentioned Anaklia in Georgia, where the houses are planned to form the stars and arrows in the Circassian flag.

<sup>482</sup> The names in the wider Sochi area are not only Circassian but sometimes also of Abaza or Abkhaz origin, especially in the southern parts. A number of legends (Narts) are shared between Circassians and Abaza/Abkhazians. Different publications on the Nart legends and/or about their origin are published, for instance, in Maikop in the Republic of Adygeya on the other side of the Caucasian mountain range but are increasingly distributed along the Sochi Riviera. (“Nartskie skazaniya dlya detei” (Nart tales for children), Elot.ru, 2008). The Nart legends generally play an important part of the Circassian revival on the Internet, though many are still in the early stages of understanding how these link to the historical homeland.

general.<sup>483</sup> Circassian names are mentioned on many souvenirs—beach bags, t-shirts, caps and magnets—that can be seen all over the Sochi area in the tourist season. Still, these souvenir products mainly represent local exotica to many tourists as few know the names are of Circassian origin.<sup>484</sup> Another example of the continued use of Circassian names is the 2012 decision of naming the Olympic Stadium in Sochi after Fisht Mountain, which is both a Circassian name and one of the most important mountains in the mythology and history of the western parts of historical Circassia.<sup>485</sup> On the one hand, this decision could place one of the requests of Circassian organisations into the spotlight, namely, the request to base the opening and closing ceremonies on local indigenous legends and symbols (as in the cases of Sydney in 2000 and Vancouver in 2010). On the other hand, this seems unlikely as, according to the preferred Russian version of the Greek legend, Fisht is the mountain where Prometheus was chained. In most Circassian versions of the Prometheus-legends, the much higher Mount Elbrus (located more than hundred kilometres south-east of Fisht) are mostly referred to, while many of the Greek versions simply just refer to “a Caucasus mountain”.

## **The Sochi Olympics in the Circassian Revival**

The reproduction of Sochi as a key location in Circassian memory and identity has become widespread among Circassians worldwide partly due to the increasingly successful institutionalisation of May 21 (1864) as a common day of remembrance. Recently, this has been further enhanced through linking and sharing slogans and photos on the Internet. These commemorative acts, as well as the wider Circassian memorialisation in general, include establishing Sochi both as the location of the last Circassian Parliament from 1861 to 1864 (therefore regularly referred to as the former Circassian capital) and as one of the last locations from where Circassians left the Caucasus in 1864 (Jaimoukha 2001, 69).<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>483</sup> Almost exclusively in Russian language.

<sup>484</sup> Including the names of Ubykh origin. In the districts of Krasnaya Polyana and Adler many of the topographic names are of Abaza or Abkhaz origin.

<sup>485</sup> Mount Fisht lies along the border to the Republic of Adygeya, north of Sochi, in an area where the so-called Circassian Trail, which links the Black Sea coast with Adygeya, is located. This trail can be expected to play an increasing role as tourism continues to grow in the Sochi region. Mount Fisht has earlier been the scene of clashing or competing popular memory when a large orthodox cross was erected on the northern side of the mountain and subsequently was removed by what is assumed to be Circassian activists (Vatchagaev 2009).

<sup>486</sup> Zhemukhov (2009) refers to Sochi as “the last capital of independent Circassia (1861-1864)”.

In combination with a number of new publications, newspaper articles and other forms of media representations, the institutionalisation of May 21 as a joint annual transnational day of commemoration among Circassians illustrates how the Circassian memorialisation has developed since the fall of the Soviet Union, including elements of “countering” or “competing” as seen in other post-totalitarian or post-colonial contexts. With the establishment of new organisations and web-based initiatives since the mid-2000s, this process has accelerated significantly, supported by an ever-increasing use of social media. A key characteristic of this development is the new role of contemporary Russia as a central target of actions and events. This accelerated process has included a new focus on Sochi as a link both to the Circassian genocide and to the 2014 Olympics, which many Circassians regard as a disrespectful travesty of the 150-year anniversary of their forced exodus from the Caucasus (Berzeg, undated). Internet-based actions today function as an extension of offline memorialisation practises, which, in many ways, have also resulted in extending the May 21 commemorative actions into potential everyday practise. The Internet can function as a “democratic” space where a plethora of websites and social media are used in the joint process of memorialisation and mobilisation. In other words, the contemporary commemorative acts among Circassians represent an extension both in terms of space and time.

Appeals for genocide recognition and the spreading of this understanding among Circassians internally were at the centre of the renewed Circassian mobilisation since 2005; following the 2007 decision to hold the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, these two issues have combined to further strengthen and accelerate the Circassian revival. Since 2007 an increased lobbying process, which included a focus on both issues, led to the Georgian parliament, in 2011, formally recognising the Circassian genocide.

Most of the Imperial Russian archives are located in Russia and have often been difficult for Circassian and international researchers to gain full access to. However, parts of the imperial archives are located in Tbilisi, a city that during the nineteenth century functioned (under the name Tiflis) as the administrative centre of Imperial Russia in the Caucasus. The cooperation between Circassian organisations and Georgia on the issue of genocide recognition resulted in a research

grant being awarded to a Circassian researcher to investigate the imperial archives.<sup>487</sup> Key documents from the nineteenth century were copied, and selected findings were presented at exhibitions and on the Internet.<sup>488</sup> The renewed attention on Sochi due to the Winter Olympics has resulted in an increased documenting of Sochi-related events as part of the general search for documents supporting the genocide claims. This include records of ships sailing with Circassian refugees from the Sochi area; the records detail how the exodus was organised, including how ships—many of which sank on route to their destinations—were overcrowded with “natives” (JFNC undated, 3; UNPO 2006).<sup>489</sup> Assessments, prepared by different Russian army officers stationed along the Black Sea coast, of the total number of “natives deported” during 1863 and 1864 are also found in imperial records. According to these sources, the final number of exiled Circassians is 470,703 (JFNC Undated, 1). Imperial Russian reports further render the existence of mass-graves in the Sochi area probable as they, for instance, include expressions of concerns from the army staff over the possibility of diseases spreading into potentially threatening epidemics due to the many bodies that were not always properly buried (Berzeg 2010, 11).<sup>490</sup> Circassian organisations working for genocide recognition claim the existence of mass graves from the time of their final expulsion; their claim is reflected in one of their key slogans: “No Sochi Olympics on the graves of our ancestors”.<sup>491</sup>

Another example of Circassian complaints can be found in an open letter of protest from a number of diaspora organisations to the Republic of Adygeya’s Parliament against their attempts to suggest the inclusion of Circassian culture and traditions in the official programme of the Sochi Olympics. The efforts of the Parliament of Adygeya resulted in the Russian Olympic Committee formally

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<sup>487</sup> Research by Ali Berzeg, who formerly represented the Circassian Congress in Maikop, Russia, but now represents the Circassian Cultural Institute (CCI) in New Jersey, USA, during two months in Tbilisi in 2009-2010 resulted in 1500 pages from 300 documents that were scanned in order to be available for future research. The conclusions of his research were presented at the conference in Tbilisi in March 2010 that functioned as a stepping-stone that led, a year later, to the formal Georgian recognition of the Circassian genocide (Berzeg 2010).

<sup>488</sup> The website “The Circassian Genocide” ([www.circassian-genocide.info](http://www.circassian-genocide.info)). Similar research and publication efforts took place in relation to Ottoman archives in Turkey. One of the first results of this access to imperial Russian archives is the book *The Circassian Genocide* (2013) by the American historian Walter Richmond. Key conclusions were presented at conferences in Anaklia, Georgia (May 2012) and in Brussels (June 2012).

<sup>489</sup> As most ships listed in the army reports were Russian. This, according to Ali Berzeg, counters the myth that most ships came from Turkey and that the staff of Turkish ships deliberately threw Circassians into the Black Sea (Berzeg 2010, 10). This myth is still circulating among tourist guides in the Sochi area. According to Ali Berzeg many Russian historians have contributed to the creation of this myth. In general this is an example of one of the key areas of Circassian research—countering circulating myths and narratives with information from archives.

<sup>490</sup> “Mass graves” is a term that—as part of the agenda on “genocide recognition”—often plays a significant role in the post-2005 renewed Circassian mobilisation.

<sup>491</sup> This research also included assessments of the total number of “deported natives”.

answering that Circassian culture will be included, together with other peoples of the Russian Federation, in the cultural programme of the Olympics (known as the Cultural Olympiad). According to the protesting Circassian organisations, this would be equal to “dancing on the graves of our ancestors” (Caucasus Forum 2010). During 2012, Circassian music and dance ensembles became more visible as part of the Cultural Olympiad.<sup>492</sup> To most Circassian activists, Circassian inclusion in the Cultural Olympiad represents yet a new way of “hiding” Circassians among a high number of cultural acts and events from all over Russia instead of recognising them as a local indigenous people. Something similar could also be said regarding the visual identity of the Sochi Olympics—the “Look of the Games”—in which folkloristic patterns from all over Russia are combined into a patchwork design.<sup>493</sup> Despite Kuban Cossacks being represented together alongside many examples from central regions of Russia, no Circassian patterns are included on the designs.

As a response to the Sochi Olympics, Circassian activists in Turkey established the website OlympicGenocide.org that later became the NoSochi2014.com website. The latter website was established through transnational cooperation between Circassian organisations from different countries, most of which belong to the post-2005 generation of Circassian organisations. Recently, this initiative has been further broadened to also include a number of older organisations, demonstrating an increased consensus on the agenda of genocide recognition. Many of the slogans, which are frequently used at Circassian/Caucasian demonstrations and events, referred to in the beginning of this chapter, were developed as part of the NoSochi2014 cooperation, which includes posters designed as part of a joint approach to the visual performance at the events.<sup>494</sup> These posters are frequently used and circulated among Circassian activists and on websites.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> Gateway to the Future, Sochi 2014 Newsletter, Issue 15, September 2012.

<http://www.sochi2014.com/en/media/bulletins>.

<sup>493</sup> Gateway to the Future, Sochi 2014 Newsletter, Issue 10, March-May 2011.

<http://www.sochi2014.com/en/media/bulletins>. According to issue 15 “Traditional patterns and designs from the North Caucasus, including from the Adyghe-Circassians, along with other ethnic decorative designs, formed the basis for the Sochi 2014 Look of the Games” (p. 28). If this is true, it marks a shift since Issue 10, when local indigenous peoples’ patterns and designs were fully ignored. It is here further noted that the Adyghe-Circassian ensemble “acquainted over a thousand spectators with cultural traditions from the Sochi region”. This could mark a decision of the Olympic authorities to be more accommodating towards the Circassians in the last phase leading up to the games.

<sup>494</sup> A Circassian/Caucasian activist from Turkey has been harassed due to his involvement in the NoSochi-campaign (Caucasus Forum 2012; Amnesty International in Turkey (Acileylem.org 2012). The NoSochi campaigners used the occasion of the London Olympics to protest against this.

<sup>495</sup> The anti-Sochi slogans have, for instance, been presented and circulated on Facebook, YouTube and other Web 2.0 sites.

As part of the NoSochi campaign, a competition for an anti-Sochi Olympics mascot was launched in October 2011 under the slogan “to reveal the true identity of the Sochi Olympics”. The background for the initiative was further elaborated: “A logo, mascot or graphic design which captures the bloody history of Sochi and the cruelty carried out against Circassians to be sent to the Sochi Olympic Committee and used in the No Sochi 2014 campaign”.<sup>496</sup> The aim of the competition was “to provide visual material to the international campaign we implemented and also support it in order to bring historical facts to the attention of world public opinion”.<sup>497</sup> A jury selected the best suggestions, and they were launched for public voting on the NoSochi2014.com website. The winning image was a snow-leopard holding a snowboard, and it was copied from the official Sochi 2014 mascots; however, the image was modified with the snow-leopard having bloody paws and with the snowboard transformed into a coffin painted as the Circassian flag.<sup>498</sup> In other words, the winner of the popular vote for the anti-Sochi Olympics mascot was a direct counter-version of one of the official mascots of the Sochi Olympics.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> The second round of this campaign was launched with a text that pointed to some of the historical persons involved on the side of the Russian army in the war in the nineteenth century (noSochi2014.com/campaign).

<sup>497</sup> The website noSochi2014.com was attacked by unidentified persons that placed a high number of votes on a specific item, but the organisers were able to partly identify and delete these votes (Information retrieved from conversations with Circassian/Caucasian activists in Istanbul in May 2012).

<sup>498</sup> See, for instance, talisman.Sochi2014.com. It is actually a Caucasian leopard that is light-brown but has often been presented as a snow-leopard, also at official events (for instance, at the sponsors, Bosco, which is also responsible for the design of the visual identity of the Sochi games, see bosco.ru; bosco.co.uk, Gateway to the Future, Issue 13, Winter 2012, p. 24). <http://www.sochi2014.com/en/media/bulletins>.

<sup>499</sup> The expert jury chose to award the first prize to one of the other designs. The winners were presented at a ceremony April 22, 2012 in Istanbul where all the suggested designs were exhibited.





May 21 Demonstration in the centre of Istanbul in 2011. The largest annual Circassian manifestation world wide that year-by-year has managed to attract increasing support. The increased use of English on posters illustrates the increasing transnationalisation of the Circassian question. The design of posters and formulation of slogans are coordinated through the NoSochi-cooperation. The demonstration is arranged by the Caucasian Forum in Istanbul. (Foto: Lars Funch Hansen).

Hacktivism is a new aspect of the Circassian revival, occurring during 2012 under names such as Adiga Hackers, Circassian-Cyber-Army and Anonymous Kavkaz.<sup>500</sup> These connected groups or initiatives have announced attacks on Russia during 2012, 2013 and 2014, and many references to Sochi and the Sochi Olympics can be found on their Face book sites and YouTube videos.<sup>501</sup> They have not only announced cyber-attacks but also potential cyber-defence actions, which include announcements that some websites—noSochi2014.com, narttv.tv, radioadiga.com, adiga.ca, adiga.com, circassianworld.com, circassian-genocide.info—will be “protected”.<sup>502</sup> A video from the Circassian Cyber Army concludes with the following statement: “We Are Coming Back to Sotchi”;

<sup>500</sup> Adiga Hackers on its YouTube channel (to April 2013) had 106 videos, 49,792 views and 130 subscribers. The Facebook-site of Adiga Hackers uses the URL “facebook.com/Anonymous.Kavkaz”. According to the site “facebook.com/ CircassianCyberArmy”, the organisation refers to itself as “CCA of Anonymous Kavkaz”.

<sup>501</sup> According to a video placed on YouTube (12-8-2012), “The Announcement of Circassian Cyber Army at 10/8/1012”, the Circassian Cyber Army is a new group initiated after being called upon by Anonymous Kavkaz and after working silently for many years.

<sup>502</sup> This type of activity is referred to as “cyber-defence” as opposed to the type of “cyber-attack” earlier announced by the same organisations and to cyber-initiatives against, for instance, the Russian Government (cyberwarzone.com 11 -4- 2012).

further, the video announced “Adiga Hackers Attacks” on the Russian government in 2013.<sup>503</sup>

Judging by the use of slogans, posters and visual images, these initiatives are intended as part of the post-2005 renewed Circassian activism, in which most of the protests and other actions target Russian authorities. Following an announcement on YouTube in March 2012, Adiga Hackers attacked two Russian websites that support the 2014 Olympics in Sochi: megafon.ru (a large telephone company) and Sochi2014.com.<sup>504</sup>

In April 2012, Anonymous Kavkaz, declared its willingness to defend the NoSochi.com website, and it once more circulated an often used poster: “SOCHI—Land of Circassian Genocide” with the Olympic rings on fire and a “May 21, 1864” logo at the bottom.<sup>505</sup> A video placed on Adiga Hackers” YouTube channel on in November 2012 begins with the image of the well-known Occupy/Guy Fawkes-mask and the speaker announcing, on behalf of Anonymous Kavkaz, “Occupy Russian Embassies Worldwide on May 21<sup>st</sup> 2013”.<sup>506</sup> The video concludes with the statement, “Join the Revolution. Save the Sochi Land”. The headline on the Adiga Hackers/Anonymous Kavkaz Facebook-site pronounce: “Operation PayBack for Sochi at 21 May” (1,075 “likes” per 8-12-2012).

Circassian activists visited and demonstrated both at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver and again in London in 2012. Even though activists from the Circassian Cultural Institute in New Jersey played a key role in both cases, in London, they were part of a wider NoSochi-initiative: the demonstrations were larger and the participants came not just from USA. In both cases, viral videos were quickly uploaded to document their actions, and these videos were further circulated among Circassian and Caucasian websites in a number of countries.<sup>507</sup> These actions have contributed to increase the visibility of Circassian protests against the Sochi Olympics.

Several other civil society organisations have protested against the Sochi Olympics on issues such as environmental protection and corruption.<sup>508</sup> They complain, for instance, that the Olympic

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<sup>503</sup> The slogans used in the viral videos include the well-known “No Sochi Olympics on the Land of Genocide” and “SOCHI - Land of the Circassian Genocide”.

<sup>504</sup> 14-3-2012 (793 views by 20-8-2012).

<sup>505</sup> Youtube.com: “Anonymous Kavkaz declares for their defence of NoSochi2014.com” (7-4-2012: 132 views by 20-8-2012).

<sup>506</sup> Youtube.com: “Anonymous Message to the Russian Government Operation #OpPayBackForSotchi”.

<sup>507</sup> Circassian dance and musical ensembles from the Caucasus took part in presentations of the Russian Olympic Committee in London and in Sochi during the London Games as part of the “Cultural Olympiad”.

<sup>508</sup> E.g. Environmental Watch in the North Caucasus (<http://ewnc.info>); the Sochi branch of the Russian Geographical Society (<http://geo.opensochi.org>).

organisers often use “double-speak”, pretending that the Games will be the “most green Games ever” while the opposite is more likely, and that civil society are put under increased pressure. However, authorities disagree: Dmitrii Kozak, Russian Deputy Prime Minister and responsible for the Sochi Olympics, has stated, “The impetus which the Olympic Games has given to the Volunteer Movement in our country will be even more important than the Olympics itself for forming civil society and for Russia’s social and political development”.<sup>509</sup>

As illustrated above, the Olympic project has elevated Sochi into a key locality in the different understandings of the historical homeland of the Circassians. “Sochi”, “1864” and “genocide recognition” constitute three issues that can be seen as linked in a triangle of constantly ongoing Circassian mobilisation, where information or promotion on one issue almost certainly both produces and reproduces the other two. In a process that began before the fall of the Soviet Union, the year “1864” has gradually become institutionalised as a so-called “defining moment” in contemporary Circassian identity (Huttenbach 1995, 673).

## **Conclusion**

The 2014 Sochi Olympics has played a facilitating role in elevating the Circassian Question into a transnational issue. Recently, the issue has managed to reach Russian mainstream media, particularly on the Internet, where access is relatively easy compared to the traditional media of TV, radio and newspapers that, to a much greater degree, are controlled by the Russian government in different ways. This increased visibility of Circassian issues is illustrated by the reactions of politicians and various expert observers in the Russian media; especially since 2011, they have begun to react to media stories on the Circassians that were generally ignored earlier.

In the accelerated memorialisation of the Circassians and their organisations, Sochi has become a long-distance site of memory among Circassians worldwide. This is particularly true for the diaspora, for which Sochi as a contemporary Caucasian location has become a key symbol of the

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<sup>509</sup> Dmitrii Kozak (<http://www.sochi2014.com/en/media/quotation/>, January 15, 2012). An environmental activist referred to the Sochi Olympic Games as a Potemkin village.

lost homeland. In this process, Sochi has been produced and reproduced as a symbol of the tragedy of war and forced expulsion in the nineteenth century that is now widely referred to as the Circassian genocide. According to Seteney Shami, the historical homeland of the Circassians shifted its status from a “mythological homeland” into a “territory” already back in the late 1990s. Compared to the contemporary situation, Shami’s conclusion represents a much smaller group of civil society actors and intellectuals. I have argued that this shift has emerged gradually and that Sochi as a geographical location has only recently achieved the type of dominance or vernacular breakthrough ascribed by Shami.

The many references on the Internet, for instance, in blogs, discussion forums and social media, to the historical as well as to the contemporary homeland in the Caucasus can be considered a form of virtual re-territorialisation. These representations of the historical homeland (increasingly with Sochi at the centre) on the Internet share a number of similarities both with various decolonisation processes from different parts of the world during the twentieth century—and with post-colonial debates and efforts in relation to other post-imperial contexts. As Linda T. Smith has noted, the term post-colonial indicates that the world has become decolonised, while in reality many indigenous peoples are still fighting against a colonial heritage that they often experience as marginalising or discriminating (Smith 1999, 98). Counter-memorialisation is often one of the key features in processes of decolonisation and in post-colonial endeavours. The gradual shift from a more general and inward-oriented memorialisation (focussing on the importance of culture and memory) towards a process that can be defined as counter-memorialisation (more directly targeting of the contemporary Russian authorities) is one of the key results of the renewed post-2005 Circassian mobilisation process. This is further revealed by the increased use of the term genocide. By engaging in this form of competing memorialisation (which has also been labelled “memory wars”), Circassian actors are part of a wider Caucasian as well as post-Soviet trend. Judging both by the Russian authorities’ lack of will to engage in open and inclusive research that includes full access to historical archives of the Russian Empire, and by the many examples of manipulated representations of the history of the region, this type of memory war can be expected to continue for many years to come.

The Sochi Olympics and the related issue of genocide recognition have come to play a key role in creating a new level of unity and transnational awareness among Circassians worldwide. The

decision to hold the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi has resulted in an increased mobilisation among Circassians—both on an organisational level and on an individual level, as can be seen by the escalation in different forms of Internet activity. Students and youth activists are significant actors in driving the renewed Circassian mobilisation process as it has been unfolding since 2005.

There is no doubt that the selection of Sochi as a host of the 2014 Winter Olympics has played a key role—perhaps *the* key role—in creating a new unity among Circassians on the understanding of the forced exile as an act of genocide. In many respects, the decision in 2007 to hold the Winter Olympics in Sochi was precisely what the activists of the renewed Circassian mobilisation needed in order to drive this process forward. However, many Circassians consider this a sad irony, as it symbolises not only the loss of the historical homeland but also a lack of respect for Circassian history in the region. Circassian representatives have brought attention to the Olympic project ignoring or even concealing the need for archaeological excavations as all Circassian villages that were burned during the war in the nineteenth century are mostly covered by forests today.

Some Circassians have voiced fears that certain sections of the Circassian movement will be regarded as being too radical or too one-dimensional; for instance, there are concerns that focussing too squarely on the issue of genocide recognition, which can be expected to be a controversial issue in Russia for many years to come, will be counter-productive for the movement. The possibility of being considered too radical is also one of the potential traps of the recent hacktivism. Nevertheless, both issues of genocide recognition and anti-Sochi Olympics are examples of initiatives that demonstrate the progression of Circassian mobilisation as many Circassians now regard the recent examples of “minor recognition” (for instance in relation to potential inclusion into the Cultural Olympiad) as too little, too late. The priority of the Cultural Olympiad to focus on national inclusion of all the peoples of Russia can be said to entail an exclusion of the local peoples, traditions and history.

The arrival of the 2014 Sochi Olympics has finalised a triangle of constantly increasing Circassian mobilisation, where the two other fixed points are constituted by “May 21 (1864)” and “genocide recognition”, respectively. These three issues have been able to mutually reinforce each other, and they produce a constantly increasing memorialisation and mobilisation that continuously create and recreate the Circassian revival. As a transnational mega event, the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics has

significantly contributed to the acceleration and spread the Circassian process of memorialisation and mobilisation both within Russia and in other national contexts of Circassian residence. Considering the manner in which the Sochi Olympics is used by Russian authorities to brand Russia internally and externally, this form of counter-branding is not surprising. The Circassian processes of (counter-) memorialisation establish Sochi as a symbol of the minimal or warped representation of Circassian memory often found in contemporary Russia.

Through the concurrence with the 150-year anniversary of the eviction of the Circassians from the Caucasus, the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics has created a link to the year 1864. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, 1864 has increasingly been institutionalised among the Circassians (and other Caucasians) through the assignment of May 21 as the annual day of Circassian commemoration. May 21, 1864 has become the defining moment in the contemporary understanding of Circassian history and identity, and in 2014 it will be commemorated as such by all Circassians around the world—including in Russia.

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## **Facts and maps on Circassians and Circassia**

Circassians in the North Caucasus region of Russia: 800,000 people (though some have moved to other parts of Russia).

Diaspora Circassians: Between two and six million, probably several millions in Turkey alone – statistics are lacking and many have assimilated. Other countries include Syria and Jordan with more than 100,000 each, Israel, Germany, USA etc. (see second map below).

In Russia, Circassians constitute ‘titular nationalities’ in three federal republics: Adygea (Adyg 25%), Kabardino-Balkaria (Kabardians 55%) and Karachai-Cherkessia (Cherkes 11%).

Aproximately 10,000 Shapsugs live Krasnodar Krai along the Black Sea coast north of Sochi. Kabardians and Shapsug are old Circassian tribes, while Adyg and Cherkes are new contructions from the Soviet period (both denote ‘Circassians’ (in Russian and Circassian language, respectively). See the first map below (Circassian areas marked with a grid pattern).

Flag (see appendix on visual representations): Green with three yellow arrows and with 12 yellow stars representing the 12 tribes or provinces of the Circassians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Designed in the 1830s by the Scotsman David Urquhart as part of the resistance against Imperial Russian colonization (Jaimoukha 2001, 71).

Religion: Muslims (Sunni). Introduced by the Crimean Tatars and the Ottoman Empire, primarily during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries and further consolidated as the war with Russia progressed.

Language: Circassian is an indigenous Caucasian language. Circassian is one of the three divisions of the North-Western group of Caucasian languages (the other two are Abkhazian and Ubykh) and is divided into two groups: a Western and an Eastern.

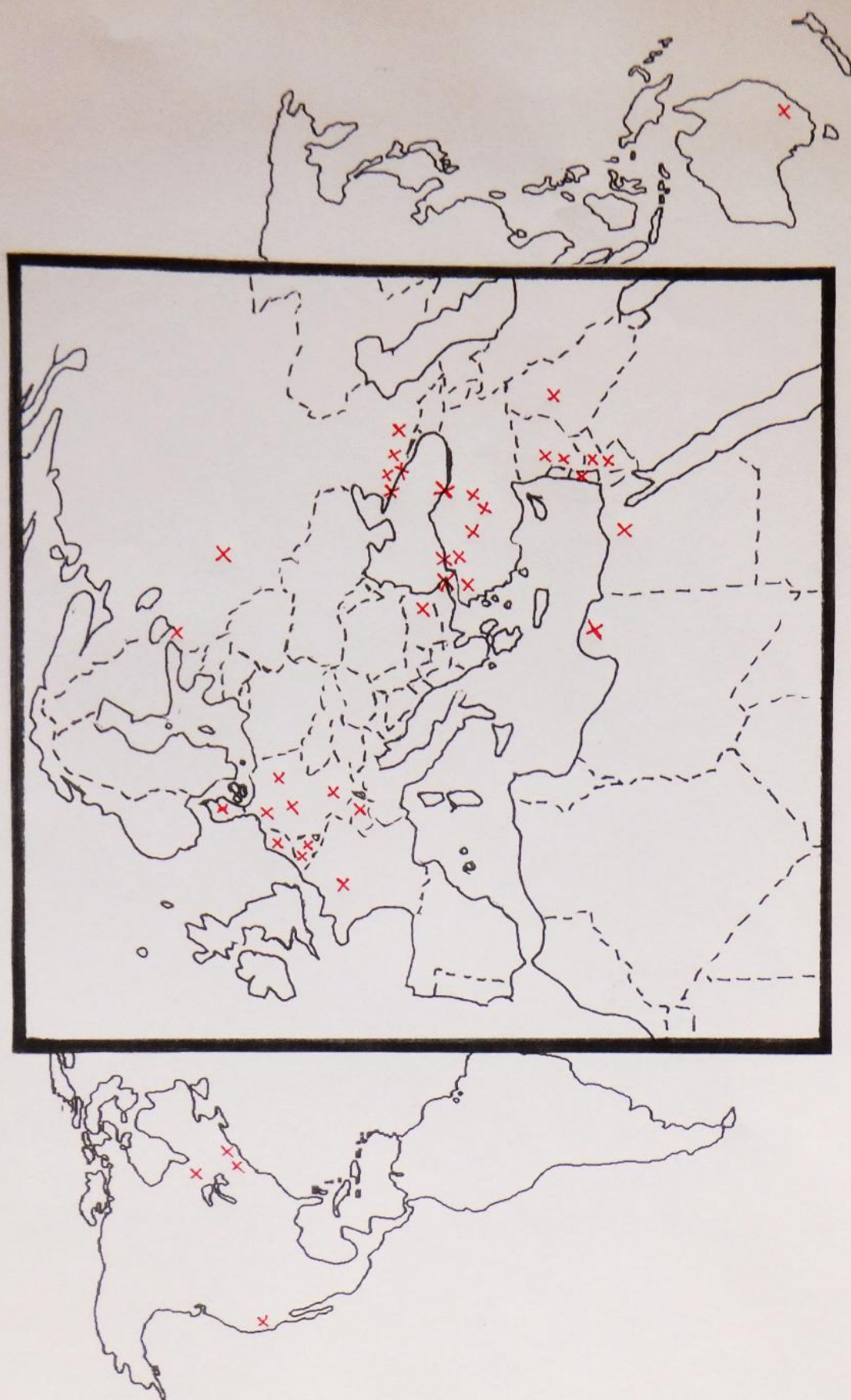
The different geographical (and other forms of) Circassian spaces are illustrated below. In relation to the Circassian spaces it should be noted that the ongoing Circassian revival (CR2 - or the second post-Soviet revival) is characterised by the increasing number of links between Circassian individuals as well as organisations, where the Internet play a considerable role.



### ***Next Page: Circassian Spaces***

The marked spots on the world map represent the dispersion and key locations of Circassians and Circassian organisations. Circassians often state that they live in '50 places around the world' and most of these are shown in the map, but, additional locations in Turkey alone would extend this figure to more than 50. Other forms of Circassian spaces that are dealt with in this thesis include:

- Historical sites (where Circassians earlier resided): Poland, Kosovo, Bulgaria, Egypt, and in the Caucasian homeland for instance Kbaada (today's Krasnaya Polyana).
- Sites of historical memory (archives, museum, archaeological collections etc.): In Russia: Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Krasnodar. In Georgia: Tbilisi, Anaklia. Inbetween: Abkhazia.
- Sites of protest, campaigns etc.: New York, Brussels, Istanbul, Anaklia etc.
- Virtual spaces (on the Internet): 'iCircassia' (see chapter 6).



## **Visual Representations of the Circassian Revival**

The role of visual representations of Circassia and Circassians in the Circassian revival has increased with the continued development of the Internet. But visual representations already in the mid-nineteenth century Circassian mobilisation against the advancing Russian Empire gained a role in illustrated journals and geography textbooks around the world, as can be seen below. Today remediation of images from the nineteenth century is a significant feature of the ongoing Circassian revival. Historical maps locating Circassia and/or the Circassians in the northwest Caucasus constitute another significant part of the visual remediations, from not just the 19th century but covering a period back to the 15th century. The map on the frontpage is one example that is discussed in chapter 5 (page 147). An extended version of the visual representations of the Circassian revival can be found on [CircassianSpaces.net](http://CircassianSpaces.net).



## May 21 Events



The centre of Istanbul, May 2010. Demonstration arranged by the youth organisation Caucasus Forum that has become the largest annual Circassian/Caucasian manifestation attracting thousands.







Istanbul May 2010. May 21 commemorative event at Besiktas by the Bosphorus Strait, at the first place where Circassians arrived in Istanbul in 1864. With poems, music and 19<sup>th</sup> century images. Ending with throwing a wreath and flowers in the water after sunset. Arranged by Kaffed.





Black Sea coast, Anaklia, Georgia. May 2012. May 21 Commemoration ceremony with flowers that later, following a prayer, are thrown into the Black Sea. Afterwards the new 'Monument of Grief' in the centre of Anaklia was officially opened (below).







Hamburg, Germany 2011. Homemade figure used at a demonstration in front of the Russian consulate. Below: Activist asked by police to move to the other side of the street.



Anaklia, Georgia. 2012. Opening of exhibition of documents from imperial Russian archives in Tbilisi. Documenting the planning and execution of the forced displacement of the Circassians 1863-64.



May 21 2009 Istanbul. Rosette given to participants of the commemorative event at the harbour. Includes references to flag, dress and '1864'.



# SÜRGÜN

## CIRCASSIAN EXILE

21 MAYIS  
1864



KAFKAS ARAŞTIRMA KÜLTÜR ve DAYANIŞMA VAKFI

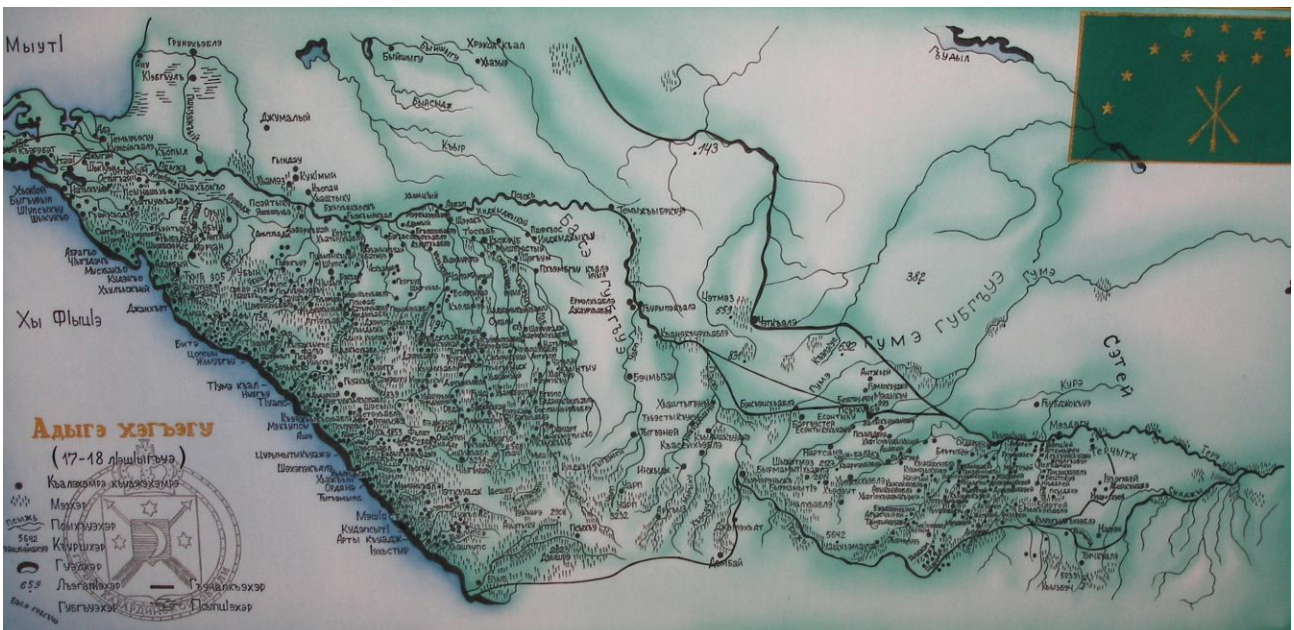
Cover of a book (Kavdav) of the presentations at a conference on the Circassian Exile held in Istanbul in 2011 (147<sup>th</sup> anniversary) in relation to the May 21 events. The map is one of the iconographic images of the Circassian Revival with the arrows illustrating the first round in the 1860s (blue) and the second in the 1870s (red).



## Cartographic representations of Circassia



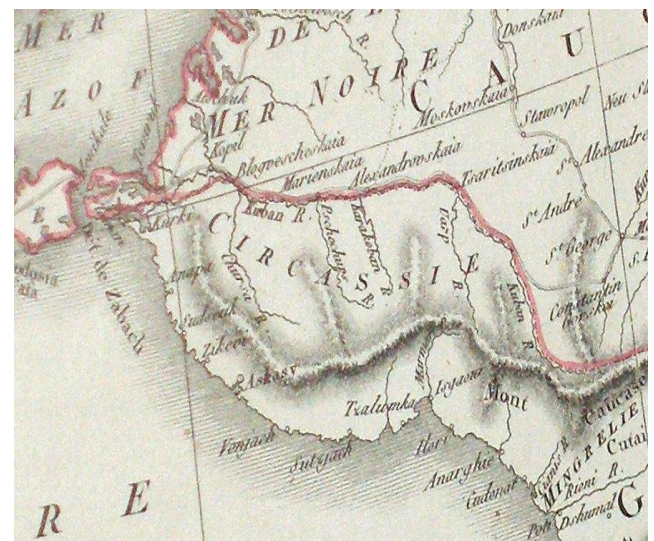
One of the two most popular cartographic representations of historical Circassia (a version mostly referred to as from the 15th – 16th centuries, though not stated in this case), with the name 'Cherkesia' and elements from the Circassian flag. Fridge-magnet (Maikop, October 2013).



A popular map of the Circassian revival, where the names of a large number of villages from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries have been reconstructed. This version is from Adyghe Hasa in Maikop (2009).



Excerpts from maps from 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that mention and localise Circassia in the North Caucasus - outside the Russian Empire. These maps figure regularly within the Circassian revival. These four maps are used in Russian Historical Museum in Moscow to illustrate the expansion of the Russian Empire (visited in 2009).





Details from four historical maps from roughly the same period as above. As seen on the wall in the offices of Circassian Cultural Centre in Wayne, New Jersey (April 2009).



Circassian subregions or subtribes in the mid-19th century before 1864. Map prepared by University of Georgia in 2012 and presented at the May 21 event in Anaklia, Georgia the same year. The map resulted in discussions on the Internet on how to define the historical borders between Circassians/Ubykh and Abkhazians/Abaza.





## Other Visual Representations or Icons of the Circassian Revival

**The Circassian Flag:** Senzhaq Sharik (green with yellow). First designed by the British publicist and politician David Urquhart in the 1830 during his stay in Circassia. Since 1991 the official flag of the Republic of Adygea. Reproduced in many forms as part of the ongoing Circassian revival.



Vanilla-scented Circassian cardboard flag (car air freshener, Maikop 2011).



Circassian Flag with stars in a circle with name 'Cherkessia' and names of 12 Circassian sub-tribes (T-shirt, Maikop 2009).



Logo for the 20 year anniversary of the Republic of Adygea, 2011. Based on the republican coat of arms from 1992.



Logo of the Istanbul Caucasian Cultural Association (2012).



## Dancing and Costumes

Dance lessons are a key activity of most Circassian cultural associations in the diaspora. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, dance instructors from the Caucasus have often visited the diaspora associations. The costumes represent a link to the historical Circassian homeland as seen in many 19<sup>th</sup> century representations.



A mirror on the wall in the Khase in Damascus, Syria (2010)



Mosaic on the Circassian cultural house in Marj al Sultan, Syria



As relief picture on the wall in the Khase in Damascus, Syria (2010)



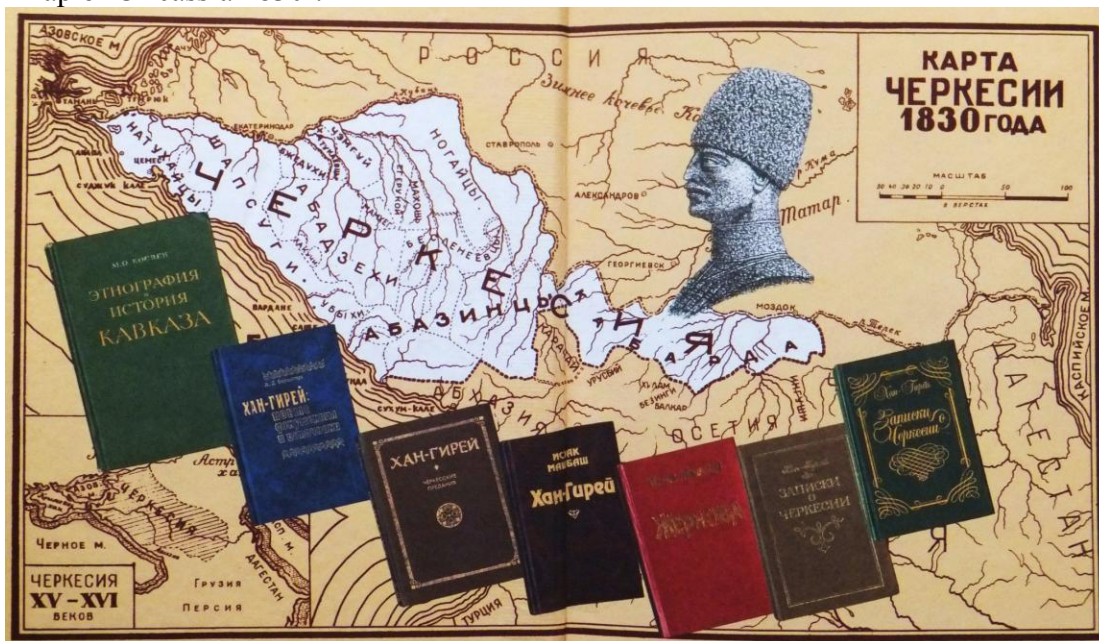
Young Circassian/Caucasian wearing a Cherkeska dancing at the opening of a exhibition at the Caucasian Cultural Association in Üsküdar, Istanbul. May, 2011.





The Pegasus rhyton (drinking-vessel for ceremonies). Perhaps the most popular image of an archaeological finding in the Circassian revival. Left: a replica on display at the Maikop branch of the State Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow (where the original is located). From 5th century BC, probably of Greek origin, excavated in Adygea in 1982. At the reopening of the branch in 2011, the Pegasus rhyton was placed as the centre piece after which the rest of the exhibitions were ordered. Right: The Pegasus rhyton remade in cheese for the day of Circassian cheese, Maikop, October 5th, 2011.

Below: From the inner cover of a book on Sultan Khan-Girei, a Circassian author from the nineteenth century, with his protrait and the covers of post-Soviet republications of his works, biographies on him etc. - placed on a version of the most popular map of the Circassian revival: 'Map of Circassia 1830'.







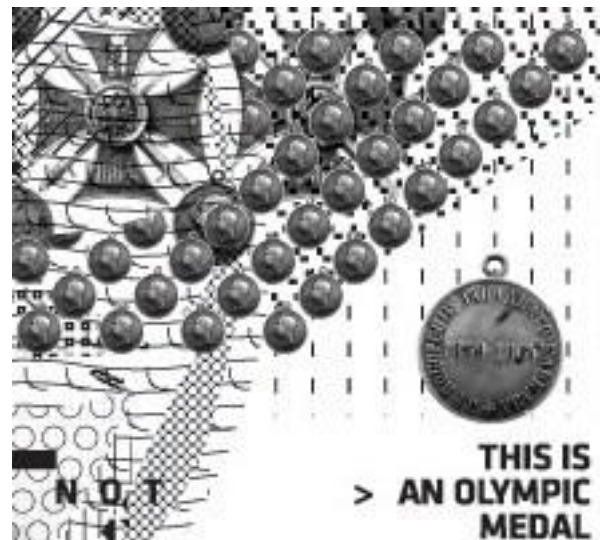
Drawing by G. Gagarin of a Circassian from 1840s on the cover of the book 'History of Circassia' by C. Kh. Khotko (St. Petersburg 2002).



'Cherkesia' written on a reproduction of a G. Gagarin drawing from 1840s. Fridge-magnet, Maikop 2009.



Russian Army medal from 1864: 'For Service in the Caucasus' and '1864'. Also used in the campaign poster to the right.



'This is n-o-t an Olympic Medal!'. NoSochi2014 campaign.



‘Circassian Lady’ (19<sup>th</sup> century). Circassian women have for centuries been famous for their beauty, not least through the Ottoman harems and slave markets.

In May 1864, the American P. T. Barnum ordered two Circassian beauties from the Istanbul slave markets for his Museum-exhibitions. From the mid-1860s Barnum regularly presented Circassian beauties, for instance as ‘Star of the East’. But these women were not Circassians.

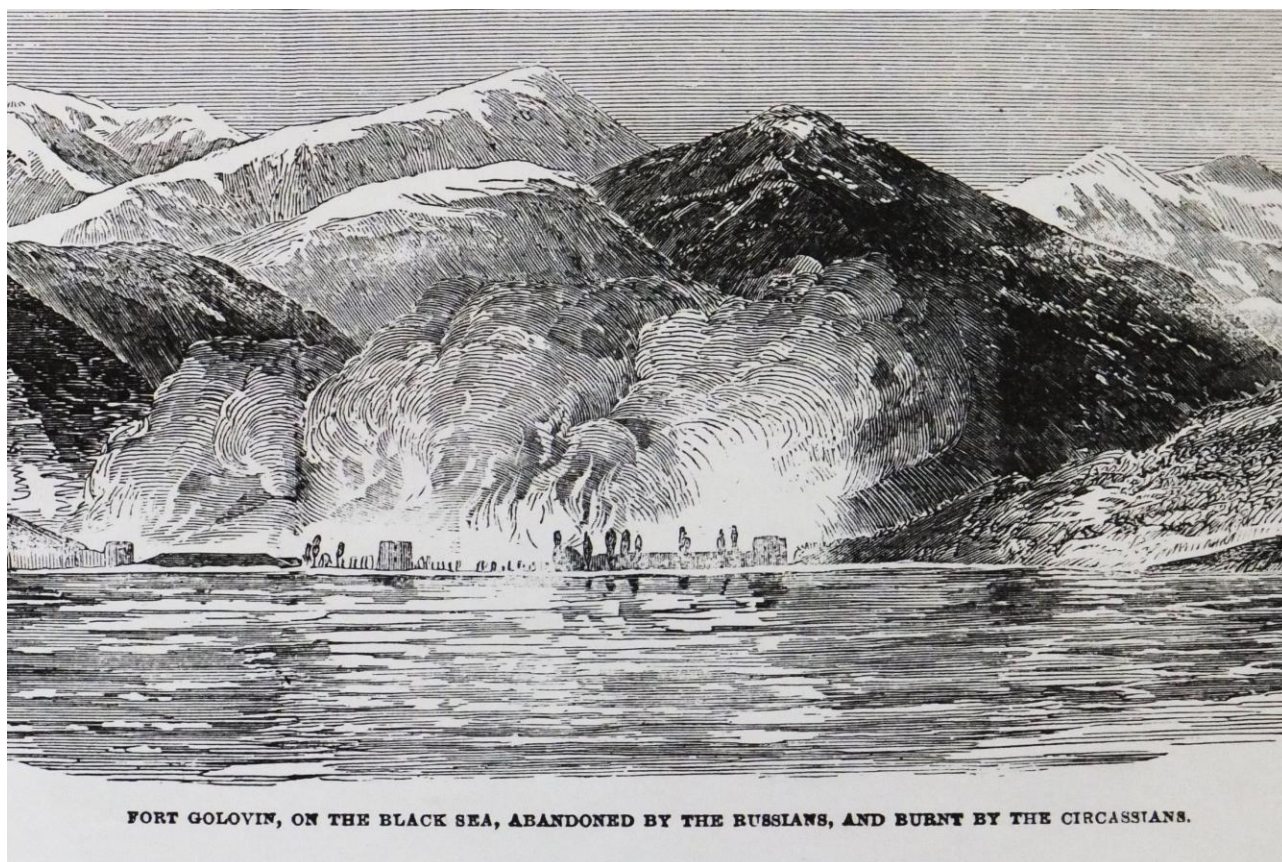
Below: ‘Circassian, shooting at full gallop’, 1832-34. A drawing by the famous Russian author Mikhail Lermontov, who was deported from St. Petersburg to the Caucasus as a punishment. Since then he has regularly been referred to as ‘the poet of the Caucasus’. He died in a duel in the spa-town Pyatigorsk on former Circassian lands in 1841.





General Zass has, together with a number of other Russian officers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, become a regular feature of the Circassian revival as an example of the atrocities committed during the violent war. The image of the Circassian skulls on the fence has repeatedly been remediated and circulated on the Internet. From a poster circulated on the Internet (undated). See also chapter 8 above.

**The Crimean War (1853-1856)** resulted in a renewed international interest in Circassia and the Circassians, as illustrated by the following examples from Illustrated London News



Fort Golovin at fire. Illustrated London News, April 29, 1854. Drawing by officer on board a British war ship. Today the location of the small town Golovinka, north of Sochi.

Next page: 'The Circassians' (two extracts from the text, ILN 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1854)

"We present, in two engravings of Circassian life, an idea of the bearing and aspect, in their homes and out of doors, of a race, perhaps, as interesting and remarkable as any that ever existed. In the first place, they are one of the most ancient nations in the world; their history is so prolonged, that, with the exception of China, of Egypt, and of Persia, the history of every other country which is at present independent, is a record of yesterday in comparison; but, if in this particular they have but one or two revivals on earth, there is a much more striking peculiarity in which they defy all parallel – and that is, that at no epoch have they ever yet lived in subjection to a foreign dominion." (then follows a paragraph on Circassians as wellknown several millenias ago...)

"We need not remind our readers in what concerns Russia, although the odds are so enourmously against a handfl of mountaineers, and in favours of the discipline, the numbers, and the resources of an immense military empire, that, despite the pertinacity of the efforts expended, the Caucasian tribes are still at a great distance from being reduced to the condition of the Poles. They are still liven under their own chiefs, with their own customs and with their own laws. It is not, therefore, merely because this race trace back so far their national history that they interest us; but because they are the only peoples on the face of the globe who can trace back so far an *independent* national history."







...and the dependencies of Redout Kaleh, which were also set on fire by the enemy on the evening of the 19th inst.

"I have, &c.,  
"EDMUND LYONS, Rear-Admiral."

"Agamemnon, at Baltschik, May 28.

"Sir,—With reference to my letters of the 17th and 21st inst., Nos. 20 and 21, I feel that my report of the visit of the allied squadron under my orders to the coast of Circassia would be very incomplete if I were not to relate that we were everywhere welcomed as deliverers by the remarkable race by whom it is peopled.

"2. The weather was fine and the water deep, so we approached very near the land, and always by daylight; and as we opened each beautiful valley, with our English and French colours flying, the Circassians flocked to the beach, and testified their joy by firing muskets and waving flags and handkerchiefs.

"3. On landing at the principal places the natives assisted us out of our boats, and, after giving expression to their delight for a few minutes, formed a circle around us, preserving the most perfect order, while their chiefs came forward and addressed the Vicomte de Chabannes and me, speaking fluently and sensibly and with an air of self-esteem, which, combined with their handsome and lofty mien and their manner of carrying their weapons, was exceedingly striking. They invariably said, that while they turned towards England and France with gratitude and admiration, as instruments in the hands of Providence for delivering them from their invaders, they confessed that they considered it the just reward of their patriotism and constancy.

"4. They are certainly a fine intelligent race, and I can readily believe them to be second to none in desultory mountain warfare.

"I have, &c.,  
"EDMUND LYONS, Rear-Admiral."

From British Newspaper 14<sup>th</sup> June 1854

## Circassian Organisations in Turkey 2008-2009<sup>510</sup>

Due to the sheer size, Turkey has a special position among the Circassian diaspora around the world. Due to its role as successor state to the Ottoman Empire, several millions of Circassians today resides in Turkey. Consequently Turkish language play an important role among the Circassian diaspora today as many has over the years moved from Turkey to various European countries, where they have established Circassian and/or Caucasian organisations.<sup>511</sup>

The history of Caucasian exile in first Ottoman and then in Kemalist Turkey has not just resulted in a confusing use of the word ‘Circassian’ as equivalent to ‘Caucasian’, but also to a widespread *solidarity* among the Caucasians in Turkey - especially among the mountain peoples mostly from the North Caucasus. This has lead to both most old and new organisations being named ‘Caucasian’ and not ‘Circassian’ - also those only or mostly dealing with Circassian issues. Most of the organisations outside Turkey use the term ‘Circassian’.

Based on how they presented themselves to me, the Circassian organisations can be placed along a line from *cultural-to-political*, where ‘cultural’ refer to a pure focus on traditional music and dance while ‘political’ at the other end refer to an orientation towards policy and advocacy efforts and ultimately promoting a Circassian agenda.<sup>512</sup> On the one side there is generally a significant level of mutual distrust between the two categories, which includes the potential relation to Russia with various accusations.<sup>513</sup> On the other hand a quite a significant number of people can be found as active in organisations belonging to both groups, as there is a culture of supporting each other, for instance caused by clan or family ties. Or because many of the older organisations are traditionally seen as associations, to which potentially all Circassians in the community belongs.

### *DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS IN TURKEY*<sup>514</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Draft paper from 2009, based on interviews and observations from 2008 and 2009.

<sup>511</sup> At most places where a certain number of Circassians reside there is usually established an association, often referred as a Khase (Council). The parliament of the Republic of Adygea is called a Khase. The first post-Soviet Circassian organisations were called Adyge Khase. In the diaspora perhaps only ten or twenty percent are members of the Khase but it is still largely regarded as representing the interests of all Circassians in the area.

<sup>512</sup> The latter are sometimes referred to as nationalistic but this is a simplification as these organisations generally consists of members of different North Caucasian and Abkhazian peoples in Turkey.

<sup>513</sup> Including accusations of being a KGB-spy or a KGB-puppet etc.

<sup>514</sup> Circassians in general still have a positive image in Turkey and a relatively high status, for instance, among civil servants and in the military. This is also reflected among the political parties, where five out of the six largest political parties in Turkey have a Circassian as a secretary (a sort of vice chairman in charge of organisational affairs). The Circassians have a reputation of being skilled at organising and networking.

As a result of the break-up of the Soviet Union, and especially the subsequent violent conflicts in Chechnya and Abkhazia, a process of redefinition of identity started among the diaspora Caucasians.<sup>515</sup> This took place mainly on a personal level, but was later also reflected in the establishment of new organisations, especially among the Abkhazians. The wars in Abkhazia and Chechnya also resulted in a new and more visible role for the Circassian/Caucasian organisations, many of which took part in provision of humanitarian assistance, support for refugees and other form of support to the parts of the homeland affected by conflict and war.

This process has been characterised by the change in re-designation of themselves as an ethnic group from being an exiled group into being a diaspora, which is a gradual process that is still ongoing - especially on the individual level. This change is reflected both in the establishing of the new organisations of the 2000's and in the (very varying) reprioritisation among the older organisation. These new developments have been enhanced by the general changes in the civil society sector in Turkey in this decade due to the gradual rapprochement to EU standards on issues such as human rights, minority rights, freedom of speech and civil society organisation in general.<sup>516</sup> These are all features that characterises Turkey as a country in transition, which will be discussed in the following.

The Circassian organisations in Turkey generally present themselves as being either 'cultural' or 'political', but instead of accepting this as two separate camps, I prefer to assess this as a 'line' where the strictly cultural efforts of folklore and dancing is at one end while the most political, often nationalistic, are at the other end.<sup>517</sup> This opens up for the placement of those in-between type of organisations engaged in a little of both and is also useful when it comes to assessing the actual type of activities the organisations. (This line also indicates a chronology, which - though not applicable for all organisations - still is generally relevant.)<sup>518</sup>

Mostly cultural: Kafder/Kaffed (key type: association) ←→

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<sup>515</sup> A rough estimate of the ethnic dispersion within the Circassian/Caucasian organisations: 75-80 % Circassians, 10-20 % Abkhazians and the rest: other (North) Caucasians or of mixed Caucasian descent.

<sup>516</sup> Adherence to these principles has also helped to reduce the pressure from Russia towards the Caucasian organisations in Turkey, whom the Russian authorities - especially in the 1990s and in the early 2000s - regularly accused of supporting terrorism in the Caucasus. Russia - unsuccessfully - suggested Turkey to close specific organisations and has managed to persuade the Turkish authorities to impose some financial restrictions on the organisations.

<sup>517</sup> To distinguish between categories of 'cultural' versus 'political' is not ideal but are maintained here for an analytical purposes. The so-called politically oriented organisations, for instance, prioritise lobbying activities.

<sup>518</sup> Another and closely related dividing line among the diaspora organisation is the relationship with and attitude towards Russia. Kaffed and some of the Kafder's appear to have the most contacts with Russia, including the authorities in the three Circassian republics in the North Caucasus. This is often perceived by the more politically oriented organisations as a sign of cooperation with Russian intelligence services or even as 'selling your soul to the devil'.

Both cultural and political: Caucasus Foundation/Shamil Foundation/BKD (type: foundation) ←→

Mostly political: Caucasian Forum/Caucasian House/(CircassianWorld) (key type: modern NGO)

### **Mostly Cultural:** (Kafder/Kaffed)

*Kafder*, which is an abbreviation for the Caucasian Cultural Association, is the most widespread Circassian organisation in Turkey with more than one hundred branches. They can be found in all Circassians settlements and has several branches in the big cities like Istanbul and Ankara. Upstarted shortly after the democratic changes in Turkey in 1950. Originally only with cultural activities focussing on dance, music and other form of folklore. Today still mainly culturally oriented, though significant changes has occurred through the last two decade. The new priorities includes language training, collecting and distributing historical documents, arranging and implementation of annual events such as May 21<sup>st</sup> (which includes conferences, publications, exhibitions etc.).

The activities and ambitions of the local branches of Kafder can be very different. There are examples of specific individuals having developed their own projects, which can be of quite different nature than the classical Kafder- focus on cultural activities. One example is the chairperson from local Kafder of Düzce, east of Istanbul and Izmir, who wish to set *repatriation* on the agenda in a much more concrete manner than Kafders (and Kaffed and ICA - see below) in general, who she accuse of just talking and not acting. As a result she has travelled back and forth between Turkey and the Caucasus, found partners and investors and taken part in the development of a new building programme for repatriates in the republic of Adygea. Consisting of concrete buildings with a co-location that include joint initiatives to support the local integration in Russia, which for many repatriates have been a serious obstacle - and has kept many from going beyond considering repatriation.

All Kafder organisations are united in an umbrella organisation called *Kaffed*, short for Federation of Caucasian Associations. Kaffed is in charge of the overall arrangement of the annual May 21 commemoration events, with the local Kafder's in charge of the practical planning and execution, which includes many volunteers - many of whom are students. In 2008 the most extensive May 21 event took place in Istanbul over a period of seven days, including one day to visit Kefken, the rocky caves where Circassians arrived at by the Bosphorus strait outside Istanbul in 1864.<sup>519</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> In 2008 a new leadership of Kaffed was elected with several new members, which some of the newer and more politically oriented organisational representatives feared would increase the control over the local Kafder's and even other Circassian/Caucasian organisations.

*Excuse:* The *International Circassian Association* (ICA) is the official world-wide Circassian organisation with headquarter in Nalchik in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria in the North Caucasus. By most of the new or politically oriented organisations ICA is regarded as controlled by the Russian intelligence services and established in order to control and contain the diaspora. As stated by one NGO-representative from Turkey: "ICA has many important issues on its agenda, but does nothing". Still, ICA can play a role in certain key issues, such as protesting against the recent transfer of territory from Kabardian parts to Balkarian in KBR. The biannual meetings also gather an impressive number of representatives from Russia and from the diaspora, as witnessed for instance in October 2009 in Maikop. The number of delegates reflects the number of Circassians in the world, which results in most participants from Turkey. Still, the agenda is controlled by the government controlled organisations in the three Russian republics in cooperation with the Kaffed leadership, which is also in line with their Russian counterparts. Suggestions from the new organisations are generally excluded from the official agenda and representatives sometimes barred from entering the meeting.<sup>520</sup>

**Both cultural and political:** (Caucasus Foundation/Shamil Foundation/BKD (key type: foundation))

The *Shamil Foundation* began operating in 1978 and the *Caucasus Foundation* in 1995. A foundation was an acceptable format for the Turkish authorities, which was not the case with NGO's that mostly were regarded as potentially anti-Turkish or anti-government. Among the main priorities the establishment of libraries and collecting of book and other relevant material for an archive, arranging conferences and publishing, scholarships and dormitories for students. Recently this has been supplemented with new agencies, support to achieve research, digitalisation of documents including online accessibility etc. Being a foundation has clearly been an advantage, as these are by far the biggest Circassian organisations in terms of square meters of offices and libraries as well as in number of employees. The board have been dominated by older dignitaries<sup>521</sup> and appears to on the one side have been rather cautious, while on the other hand engaging in efforts to cooperate with the homeland.<sup>522</sup> The foundations appear to be gradually changing into modern NGO's and increasingly engage youth as activists, web editors etc.

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<sup>520</sup> This happened to, for instance, the representatives of the relatively new organisations called Circassian Congress in the North Caucasus.

<sup>521</sup> Who are highly respected and often have done crucial efforts in consolidating and developing the foundations.

<sup>522</sup> Some board members of the foundation in the 1990s actively cooperated with the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus - especially in connection with the conflict in Abkhazia, where they were involved in peace negotiations. The cooperation with the Confederation was planned to be increased but instead the opposite happened. This was especially due to the war in Chechnya and to new difficulties of obtaining visas to travel to the North Caucasus. (Although the idea of the Confederation is generally accepted as dead in the North Caucasus - at least for the time being - it is still an ideal for many Caucasians in Turkey.)

The *United Caucasian Association* (BKD) was established in 1951 by persons from the exiled governments of the two short-lived North Caucasian republics of the period between 1917 and 1921, when Soviet power was finally consolidated in the region.<sup>523</sup> Dissemination and discussion of ideas from this period resulted in a revitalisation of BKD after 1991, as many Caucasians in Turkey still argue that a joint multi-ethnic North Caucasian republic should be established in the future. These sentiments were further enhanced by the war in Abkhazia and the subsequent contacts with the Confederation of Mountain Peoples. "We used to regard the Caucasus as the land of our dreams and before the new changes of 1991 had sunken in war broke out and ruined the new prospects. But now we are ready."<sup>524</sup> Both of the above mentioned foundations were started by former members of BKD.

BKD defines themselves as both a cultural and a political organisation and argue that these two are connected and strengthen each other. Cultural activities still seem to be the main activities and the target groups are mainly youth. BKD also prioritise to teach the youth about the history and culture of the (North) Caucasus and arrange annual exchange of students and youth dance groups. In order for youth from the diaspora and from the homeland to meet, exchange views and get a better understanding of each other. And perhaps lay the ground for further cooperation - and even potential repatriation - in the future.

The main challenge for BKD is to reorganise the association into a modern NGO, for which there is a general lack of funds. Lack of time and expertise is also an issue as the association is still run on a voluntary basis.

#### **Mostly political (and new): (Caucasian Forum/Caucasian House/(CircassianWorld))**

The *Caucasian House Social and Strategic Research Centre* (CH) was established in Istanbul in 2007 motivated by the fact that the more than hundred Caucasian/Circassian organisations had difficulties cooperating and still mainly focussed on cultural activities. The goal is to establish a think-tank type of organisation. The aim is to activate intellectuals and others in both Turkey and the Caucasus to promote the consciousness of the common destiny for present and future generation. Also motivated by the threat of total assimilation in the next generation in Turkey.

CH regard their organisation as representing a new direction with the Caucasian/Circassian civil society organisations in Turkey, as the others mainly belong to two 'umbrellas': most of the older organisations or associations are loyal to Russia and controlled by the Moscow

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<sup>523</sup> Also partly inspired by the succeeding Autonomous Soviet Mountain Republic from 1921 to 1924.

<sup>524</sup> BKD interview, May 2008.

endorsed local Caucasian authorities<sup>525</sup>, while the rest mainly are engaged with the Turkish authorities.<sup>526</sup>

The *Caucasian Forum* (CF) is a youth organisation established in Istanbul in 2005, without membership or a central leadership and with all activities organised in self-managed working groups.<sup>527</sup> First gathered around support to Chechen refugees, but soon discovered a common Caucasian identity and solidarity among the youth - and a wish to enhance and support these sentiments among the diaspora, where many seemed unaware of history and culture. The first years was used on publication, information and establishment of extra-curricular lectures in Caucasian issues at educational institutions in Istanbul and Ankara. This location has made it possible to include relevant specialist in the courses. This work has in more than one way functioned as a learning experience for the CF activists and still continues to be a priority. Other priorities include the 'OlympicGenocide' website and the related protests against the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics, which is supported by several other Circassian/Caucasian organisations in Turkey. Future plans on this issue include multi-media productions for the internet and activities on different internet and media platforms.

CF plan to use their website - and the internet in general - in a more integrated way in the future - partly because this can be done by youth activists almost without funds. The plan is to use Turkish, English and Russian languages on the website. It is the aim of the CF to cooperate as much as possible with the other Circassian/Caucasian organisations and activists from CF can be found in several projects in other organisations. Within the next couple of years CF plan to increase the cooperation with diaspora organisations in other countries, including the Middle East. Likewise it is the aim of CF to develop cooperation with international organisations, though initial attempt has proven to be unsuccessful. ... CF arrange public demonstrations - a relatively new thing in Turkey - often in cooperation with other Caucasian organisations, who clearly see the benefit of including CF, who can easily assemble youth based on the use of mobile phones and internet and promote the issues through IT-instruments.

*CircassianWorld.com* was established by primarily one Circassian activist in Ankara in 2005 with the main goal of providing information and analysis to Circassians as well as to non-Circassians under the motto: "Information is valuable as long as it is shared". From 2009 Abkhasian issues was moved to a new separate website called *AbkhazWorld.com*. The choice of English as prioritised language has resulted in a significant profile internationally, while the many Turkish (or Russian) language sites still are preferred by most Circassians.

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<sup>525</sup> Many of the leaders in the associations are still former military or policemen or civil servants.

<sup>526</sup> This is partly because it still is perceived as potentially risk-full to promote ethnic identity in Turkey though this is gradually changing.

<sup>527</sup> Approximately 75 active participants (2008).

The term ‘Circassian World’, which indicates the scattering of the Circassians all over the world, has gained widespread acceptance as popular joint designation for all Circassians.

### ***SUMMARY OF RECENT TRENDS***

There is a significant accord on the *motivation* of the Circassian organisations: it is important to preserve our culture and identity as it is threatened by assimilation in all countries of their scattered communities. In Turkey many are further motivated by a time factor: the present seventh generation in exile is the first generation to lose the Circassian language. This is identified an urge to act immediately - according to these assessments it can be too late already in ten years. The apparent unity in current motivation reflects a contradiction typical to modern diaspora conditions, where new urban and globalised living conditions on the one side results in the establishment of new organisations setting new agendas, while simultaneously losing the language, which used to be regarded as one of the very few key fundamental pillars of their ethnic identity.<sup>528</sup>

When listing the concrete activities and priorities of the above mentioned organisations a more diverse dispersion of activities become apparent, than reflected in the statements on belonging to either the cultural or the political camp. The eighteen types of activities can be regrouped into the ten types, several of which are connected or overlap, though not always:

1. Dance, music, costume sewing - folkloristic features
2. Language training - courses, preparing teaching material including web based
3. Enlightenment teaching (in history, culture etc.)
4. Student support, scholarships, dormitories, job and carrier support
5. Linking Circassians/Caucasians, including through the internet
6. Repatriation support, promotion - incl. housing projects
7. Cooperation with homeland: Student exchange, tourism promotion (private sector overlap)
8. Transnational cooperation: May 21 events, Sochi OL 2014 protests, Recognition of genocide
9. Humanitarian aid, legal assistance (to refugees, to Caucasus)
10. Documentation/research/archives/libraries/publications/information/media-news provision (conferences/seminars), museum

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<sup>528</sup> There is a clear split in the assessment of the *language* issue: Some organisations and individuals have language training as their most important issue, which is manifested in arranging training courses, promoting the use of the Cyrillic alphabet version (which is an obstacle for many diaspora Circassians), publishing books and magazines and establishing websites in Circassian language, training their own families etc. Others state that the language is important, but it is equally important to focus on other areas of the cultural survival of the Circassians, as the loss of language could be happening anyway (a global condition or trend). Some of these opt to learn Russian language, as this is important in the homeland.



This variation of priorities includes all the organisations - for a number of different reasons. In general the picture is much more blurred and varied than the self-understanding of the organisations presented above. Among the politically oriented or those belonging in the middle category their analysis differ from an acceptance of Circassian dance and music being so popular and the only issue that seriously attract a high number of participants and to acknowledging that many of them are new, poor and small - and realising the large need for engaging and enlightenment among the Circassians themselves, they have to take a number of small steps before they can act as politically as their ambition tells them. This is reflected in the above list, where the main target group are the Circassians themselves, especially those in their own communities and including attempt to reach out to those not yet active members of the organisations. The other main target group could be called the 'world community', as there is a huge wish among many Circassian intellectuals and organisations to document and argue for a re-entry of Circassia and the Circassians in the history books of the world.<sup>529</sup> They find it especially important to challenge the official Russian history writing, which is a difficult task for small and geographically scattered organisations and intellectuals, though the use of the Internet has shown some potential for this type of action in the future.<sup>530</sup>

Stuart Hall has analysed the relationship between 'cultural identity' and 'diaspora' among different cultural groups under post-colonial circumstances that have many similarities with the ongoing Circassian re-identification into a 'diaspora' instead just constituting an exiled group. This includes a so-called 'victim diaspora'.<sup>531</sup> This has come as an extension of the re-ethnification that has taken place among the Circassians since the early 1990's, both in post-Soviet Caucasus and among the diaspora. The term 'diaspora' is still new to many Circassians. Stuart Hall has defined two 'positions' in the understanding of cultural identity among diaspora groups. The first can be labelled 'cultural revival', which incorporates many of the above mentioned activities of the Circassian diaspora organisations. This process is typical for transitionnal contexts, which both Russia and Turkey, arguably, could be said to belong to. The transition from being an exiled group primarily with mythological connection to the homeland into a self-designation as a diaspora, is reflecting a general politicisation of all the Circassian organisations (and little by little the whole Circassian community). Even those defining themselves as strictly cultural now take an active role in researching for and presenting historical documentation and in arranging the annual May 21 event, which has

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<sup>529</sup> The perception of having a 'hidden history' is as motivation to many activists.

<sup>530</sup> Several Circassian/Caucasian organisations are new and several are established by young activists inspired by international trends for NGO-activities. At the same time, several have funding problems and have had to reprioritise their activities. Fundraising is one of the major challenges in the transitional civil society sector, where the Circassian/Caucasian organisations have traditionally been used to finding sponsors within own members or among Circassian/Caucasian business men.

<sup>531</sup> According to Robin Cohen (1997, 235), the term 'victim diaspora' contain a strong potential for social mobilisation - as is the case regarding the above mentioned rediscovery of 'hidden histories'. Many representations of diaspora groups have a character of 'imaginary reunification', which can also be observed among the Circassians.

grown into being a significant success story as marked by all Circassians around the world. This represents a collective politicisation - from exile to diaspora communities.

Regarding motivation and target groups, there appeared to be more unity than anticipated or stated by the organisations, the big difference is found in relation to goals and strategies. Many new organisations state their ambition to act political - including support to the homeland Circassians and to repatriation, in order to protect and preserve their culture and identity. They accuse the older and more culturally oriented organisations for doing what they always have done, which has shown just to lead to further assimilation, with a little folklore on the top as decoration (until even that eventually will disappear). On the other hand several of the new organisations hesitate to state their long term goals, as they fear - at least for the time being - that it can serve to widen the gap between the diaspora and the homeland Circassians and generate hostility in Russia in general. These are difficult discussions, which potentially can almost paralyse an organisation into a non-active state. Still, this is exactly what has driven many members of older or more culturally oriented organisations into establishment of new organisations. Such dilemmas are central to understanding the context in which the Circassian diaspora organisations find themselves.

In spite of the differences, the mutual suspicion and even hostile emotions expressed, there is a considerable amount of cooperation and overlap of active personnel between the organisations of all three categories. Actual cooperation is taking place and even functions as a positive cross-fertilisation and vitalisation of the organisations. Youth play a large role in this process, with a generally (sometimes surprisingly) very cooperative approach towards the older organisations - probably also affected by the Circassian traditions of respect for older generations. (And by the need for their social media and general ITC-skills.)

It is clear that a growing number of Circassians have become active with the arrival of the new organisations. Also the extend of interest and involvement of youth is a success, which is an encouragement for the organisations, but also a challenge as the youth are internationally oriented, which brings new challenges to both the form and the content of the activities. Still, many Circassian activists voice frustrations about the big number of inactive Circassians, who appear to accept with their cultural loss as part of an overall assimilation to a globalised urban lifestyle.

It is apparent that Circassian civil society has undergone significant changes through the last five or six years and that an entirely new level of politicisation has been established. And a new diversity of activities has been initiated. Still, this is just the beginning of a long process that can develop into very different scenarios. Which most organisations seem to be aware of, in spite of being new, small and relatively vulnerable.

## Summary

This thesis is an investigation into key aspects of an ongoing revival of the Circassians, who live geographically dispersed as minorities and diaspora groups in many countries of the world. Their original historical homeland was in the Caucasus and their dispersal was the result of a lost war against the expanding Russian Empire in the nineteenth century. The war ended in 1864.

The contemporary Circassian revival, as it has unfolded since 2005, is the second post-Soviet Circassian revival, but now with a much stronger element of transnational civil society cooperation that includes a significant use of the Internet. As such the ongoing Circassian revival represents an example of a late-modern (Eurasian) trajectory as affected by key elements of contemporary globalisation such as Internet-based mobilisation, cross-border civil society networking, minority rights and mobilisation etc. It fosters new possibilities for civil society mobilisation - particularly in the two dominant Eurasian states of Russia and Turkey - where the rights of minorities are often still a field of conflict. This is for instance reflected in Circassian claims for revision of official history-writing, which are in line with similar developments among other minority groups.

I apply the term ‘frontier-zones (of globalisation)’ developed by Saskia Sassen to analyse and discuss how the Circassian civil society mobilisation has created new transnational public spheres that have resulted in a more successful lobbying on behalf of Circassian issues than before. The main focus and the target of many of the new post-2005 Circassian diaspora organisations and their activities have been the Russian authorities in an attempt to attain recognition of their forced exile in the nineteenth century as an act of genocide. Assessing different aspects of the transnational Circassian revival, I conclude that the search for ‘recognition’ in a broader understanding can be assigned as the key aim of the efforts of many of the Circassian actors. The use of the term frontier-zones also points at new ways of becoming geopolitical actors in the Caucasus context during the era of globalisation.

I have chosen to employ the term ‘digital capitalism’ as an extension of Benedict Anderson’s term print capitalism and Arjun Appadurai’s electronic capitalism, in order to analyse and discuss how the new conditions for minority mobilisation have changed and have increased the outcome of this mobilisation, where the use of the Internet plays an important role. One of these results could be regarded as a form of virtual re-territorialisation of the Circassian homeland that was lost in the nineteenth century. This at the same time represents a new form of community building and identity building. Prominent features of Web 2.0 such as Facebook and YouTube with their interactive elements function as important tools in these processes.

I argue that the three issues of a) the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, b) the pursuance of genocide recognition, and c) the annual May 21 commemorations of the 1864 exile, together can be seen as constituting a triangle of Circassian revival, where mobilisation on one issue immediately activates the other two issues.

## Dansk Resumé

Denne afhandling udgør en undersøgelse af centrale aspekter af den igangværende fornyede revival blandt tjerkessere, som lever som geografisk spredte minoriteter og diasporagrupper i en række lande verden over. Deres oprindelige historiske hjemland var i Kaukasus, og deres fordrivelse var resultatet af en tabt krig mod det ekspanderende russiske imperium i det nittende århundrede, som sluttede i 1864. Den nuværende tjerkessiske mobilisering, som tog sin begyndelse i 2005, er den anden post-sovjetiske tjerkessiske revival. Den er præget af et betydelig stærkere tværnationalt samarbejde mellem civilsamfunds-organisationer og en signifikant brug af internettet. Som sådan er den igangværende tjerkessiske revival et eksempel på en senmoderne (euro-asiatisk) udviklingsretning - under påvirkning af centrale træk af globaliseringen som f.eks. Internet-baseret mobilisering, grænseoverskridende civilsamfunds-netværk, mindretals-rettighejder og -mobilisering etc. De nye muligheder for civilsamfunds-mobilisering - især i de to dominerende Euro-asiatiske stater Rusland og Tyrkiet - hvor minoritetsrettigheder stadig ofte udgør et politisk konfliktfelt. Dette kommer bl.a. til udtryk i de tjerkessiske krav om revision af officiel Russisk historieskrivning, som er et emne, der også er rejst af andre minoritetsgrupper.

Jeg anvender begrebet 'frontier-zones (of globalisation)', som er udviklet af Saskia Sassen, til at analysere og diskutere, hvordan den tjerkessiske civilsamfunds-mobilisering har skabt nye transnationale 'public spheres', hvilket har resulteret i, at tjerkessiske spørgsmål er kommet højere op på 'dagsordenen' end tidligere. I et forsøg på at opnå anerkendelse af deres tvungne eksil i 1800-tallet som et folkedrab er de russiske myndigheder blevet den primære målgruppe for mange af aktiviteterne blandt de tjerkessiske organisationer, især de nyere etableret efter 2005. Jeg konkluderer efter at have undersøgt og iagttaget den tjerkessiske revival på flere niveauer, at opnåelse af anerkendelse - som del af et folk med en distinkt historie - kan betegnes som et overordnet mål for stort set alle aktiviteter. Betegnelsen 'frontier-zones' kan også bruges til at diskutere nye måder at blive geopolitiske aktører på, bl.a. for civilsamfunds-organisationer.

Jeg har valgt, at anvende betegnelsen 'digital capitalism' som en forlængelse af Benedict Andersons 'print capitalism' og Arjun Appadurais 'electronic capitalism'. Dette er med henblik på at analysere og diskutere, hvordan de nye betingelser for organisering blandt minoritetsgrupper har resulteret i øget mobilisering, hvor anvendelse af internettet spiller en vigtig rolle, og hvor 'medieret erindring' ligeledes spiller en signifikant rolle. Et af disse resultater er en form for virtuel 're-territorialisering' af det tjerkessiske hjemland, der forsvandt med den endelige russiske kolonisering. Dette repræsenterer samtidig en ny måde at etablere fællesskaber og identitet på. Fremtrædende eksempler fra Web 2.0 som Facebook og YouTube, bl.a. pga. deres interaktive funktioner, fungerer som vigtige redskaber i disse processer.

Jeg argumenterer for, at de tre emner, a) 2014 Vinter-OL i Sochi, b) kravet om anerkendelse det tjerkessiske folkedrab samt c) de årlige minde-arrangementer for eksilet i 1864 i forbindelse med 21. maj, tilsammen kan ses som en 'triangel af tjerkessisk revival', ifølge hvilken mobilisering på ét af områderne, nærmest automatisk skaber mobilisering i forhold til de to øvrige.